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Vol. III. Single Number.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.
No. 62.

The Shadow Ship; OR, THE RIVAL LIEUTENANTS:

A Tale of the Second War with Great Britain.

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AUTHOR OF "THE FLYING YANKEE," "RALPH ROY," "DIAMOND DIRK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG OFFICER'S ADVENTURE.

THE brazen notes of the town clock had just tolled the hour of twelve, one dark, blustering, and unusually severe night of December, 18—, and through the ice-covered streets few wayfarers were to be seen, bold enough to face the cruel wintry blasts, that rushed relentlessly along the deserted thoroughfares of New York city, and moaned piteously about the eaves of the tall houses.

The rumble of wheels had died away, the hum of busy life had ceased, and the watchman of the city, though enveloped in warm wraps, had sought shelter from the storm around some friendly corner that protected him from the cutting wind.

And yet there was one human daring enough to face the fury of the icy breath of the gale, as, muffled in a heavy Spanish cloak, he strode with firm, quick step along the lonely streets, his figure casting many a dancing, fantastic shape, like a giant demon, as he hurried by the flickering lamps upon the corners.

Turning from Ann street into Park Row, he soon came to a doorway brilliantly lighted, and ascending a carpeted stairway to the second floor he stopped upon the landing, whereon, in front of a small stove, sat a man dressed in a suit of black, that looked as if it had once done service for one of the priesthood or "brethren of the cloth," for it had that unmistakable cut which usually characterizes the "ministerial" garb.

The wearer, a man of forty, possessed a calm, sinister face, pale and hardened, and his keen, small eyes turned inquiringly upon the stranger who had halted before him.

"What would you, sir?" he asked, quietly, while he still gazed intently upon the person he questioned.

The stranger's face flushed slightly, but he firmly replied:

"This is a gambling-hell, I believe."

"A hard name, sir, to call a place where gentlemen of means can add to their capital; but, as I observe you are a new-comer, we will not quarrel. Would you play, sir?"

"Yes: for that purpose I came here."

"Very well, I will permit you to pass, though it is our custom always to know our man, ere he can enter; yet you look like a gentleman and not a spy, so I will allow you to enter."

"Thank you," and so saying the stranger was walking off toward a door near by, when the man called to him:

"One minute, sir: the entrance fee is five dollars, and I must request you to leave any arms you may have about you, for it is against our rules to allow an armed man to enter the saloon."

"So be it; I am no assassin" returned the stranger, and throwing aside the folds of his

Spanish cloak the act displayed that he wore the uniform of a naval officer of a lieutenant's rank—a circumstance the doorman had failed to observe before, as, upon entering the stairway, the young man had taken his gilt-edged cap from his head, and held it beneath his cloaked arm.

"Here are my sword and pistols, and here is your fee," remarked the stranger, and the next moment he stood within the gambling-saloon, which was furnished with extravagant magnificence, and a blaze of light from the innumerable lamps and chandeliers, made the room as brilliant as noonday.

Few persons were in the room, owing to the stormy character of the night, but those few were engaged at play, staking gold according to their possessions, against the fickle god of fortune.

Hesitating momentarily, as he entered the gilded saloon, the bright light fell full upon the stranger, displaying a form six feet in height, a perfect physical development and a carriage of wonderful grace, while the face, that of a young man of perhaps twenty-four years of age, was one that few persons, once glancing into, would not turn for a second and third look, so striking was it in manliness, beauty and expression.

It was a sun-browned face, shaded by waving, dark hair, rendered more manly by a brown mustache, and with features perfect in their regularity, while the eyes were black, large, full of expression and slumbering fire.

Clad in the handsome uniform of a naval officer, his appearance, even amid that indifferent assemblage, created remark, and many eyes were turned upon him, as, with a slightly hesitating step, he advanced toward the roulette table, around which were gathered half-a-dozen wealthy citizens, risking the fortunes they had earned through a life of industry in endeavoring to double them by chance.

Behind the table sat a man of middle age, and upon his face the crimes and vices of his life seemed engraved with an iron pen, so deeply were they cut into the bold, bad features.

Still he was well dressed, though with a manner thoroughly *flash*; and his voice was not unpleasant as he asked the young officer, for his quick eye had discovered him as he entered the saloon:

"Do you play, sir?"

"I came for that purpose; but I must confess my ignorance of the game," remarked



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the young officer, whose face colored, as though it were a crime to be ignorant of the rules of gambling.

"A novice, eh? Well, you'll soon learn, and a lesson once learned here is seldom forgotten; but, though gambling may cause much misery in the world, even so does it bring much happiness—"

"I asked not that you should moralize, sir, but instruct me in the game," haughtily interrupted the stranger, and as if struck with the tone and manner, which admitted of no trifling, the man said:

"This little horizontal silver wheel revolves, as you see, sir, and in each of these cavities are numbers, corresponding with numbers of red and black on the table."

"You see I turn the wheel quickly, and spin this marble into it, and, when the motion has ceased, whatever cup, either red or black, contains the marble, that is the winning number."

"Thank you," and so saying the young officer took from his breast pocket a large roll of banknotes and placed a one hundred dollar bill upon the little square with a black number, upon the table.

"All set!" cried the keeper, and at the same time he spun the ivory ball, or marble, into the revolving wheel, and all eyes anxiously watched the little fickle messenger of luck, or ill-luck, as it capered around, and finally stopped in the cup containing the corresponding number with that upon which the stranger had placed his stake.

"Fifteen red!" sung out the keeper in professional tones, and then he rejoined, pleasantly:

"Fortune favors you, sir."

The young man made no reply, and again covered a square with five times the amount of his stake, and around went the ivory ball.

"Double o red!" drawled out the keeper, and with a small rake of gold he held in his hand, he shoved over toward the young man thirty-two times the amount he had risked, and with a calm, but not exultant face the officer took up the moneys.

"I paid the amount won upon the same square, sir," said the officer, and the eyes of the keeper twinkled, for it was seldom that the double o red ever turned up in a game, and more remarkable if it did so twice in succession.

But by a strange coincidence the bank lost, and the keeper, with a gloomy face, handed over the ready cash, and the check for the balance of the winnings.

With a countenance become suddenly pale at his good fortune, but in a calm manner, the officer turned from the table, when the voice of the keeper recalled him.

"Will you not give the bank at least a small chance of revenge, sir? You have won an enormous sum."

"I know it. I needed an enormous sum! Was not my winning fair?"

"Perfectly, sir; only the banks always claim their revenge against a large winner," said a gentleman who had been playing and lost.

"How mean you, sir!"

"Why, the winner plays again, and gives them a chance."

"Certainly; I would not be niggardly," and stepping up to the table again, the officer placed the whole amount of his winnings upon the double o black.

Again he won, and around him gathered every personage in the room, drawn thither by the strange freak of fortune that had visited him.

"Double o black calls for double the amount of your stake, sir; we have no more cash and must give you the check of the bank," said the keeper, in a trembling voice.

"Very well; I now place all I have won, and over thousand dollars I brought with me, upon the—red," and with a calm face the stranger watched the circling wheel and dancing ball, if anything more unmoved in manner than any one else present.

"Black wins!" almost shrieked the keeper, in his joy, and he raked quickly toward him the fortune, that a moment before was in the hands of the stranger.

As pale as death, and with the veins of his forehead swelling boldly out, the young officer gazed vacantly upon his lost fortune; but then, choking back the sob that arose in his throat, he drew from his pocket a handsome watch with a chain of rare workmanship attached, and unhesitatingly placed it upon a black number.

"Red wins," cried the keeper, and all eyes turned upon the officer, who, with hard, set features and bloodless face wheeled slowly from the table and walked from the brilliant sal-

upon the stairway, as he checked him to place in his hand the sword and pistols left in his charge.

"I have gambled away my life," was the hoarse reply, and seizing his weapons the young officer fled from the hated halls of gilded crime, and once more faced the bitter cold and driving steel.

Swiftly wending his way down Fulton street, his brow dark and teeth set, he appeared unmindful of the piercing wind, for his cloak fluttered wildly behind him instead of being drawn close around his form to keep out the chill.

In a few moments he arrived upon the dark and deserted banks of East river, and the mad roar of the storm, the dash of the waters, and gloom of the spot seemed to chime in well with his own desolation and despair, for he stood a long while gazing into the darkness, and apparently in deep and painful thought.

"Yes," he murmured through his set teeth. "Yes, certainly am I doomed, for what on earth is there for me to live for now?

"An outcast from the circle of my fellowmen, branded with a stain of guilt I brought not upon myself, I have naught to live for now, and—yes, these dark waters shall close forever over—Ha! what sound is that?" suddenly broke off the intending suicide, as the noise of cursing and blows was borne to his ears, mingled with the howl of the storm.

Quickly banishing his own gloomy meditations, the young officer strode swiftly toward the noise of combat, and at the corner of the street that faced the river, came suddenly upon a most animated scene, and one in which he at once became a participant.

Against the brick wall of the houses stood a man, bravely defending himself with a short sword, against four burly ruffians, who were pressing him hard, each with a formidable cutlass; but with a remarkable display of skill and courage he that had been waylaid was beating back his foes, and eventually might have defeated them had not one of them become infuriated at his resistance, and drawn a large pistol from his belt, which he was in the act of firing when the young officer arrived unexpectedly upon the spot.

A glance showed him a solitary man, in the garb of a gentleman, defending himself against four ruffians; he drew his sword, and by one fierce blow severed the hand that held the pistol, just at the wrist.

With a howl of anguish, the ruffian fell back, and springing forward, the stranger again used his keen blade with terrible effect, and another of the attacking party fell, run through the heart, while the remaining two fled hastily away.

"You are an expert, sir, in swordsmanship, and I owe you my life," frankly said the person who had been attacked, stepping forward and grasping the hand of the young officer, who answered, sadly:

"Yes, I saved one life, and have perhaps taken two; but, do not mention the service, I beg you."

"And not now will I, for already I hear the alarmed guard approaching, and it will not serve my purpose to be mixed up in a broil just at this time, for special reasons. Come!"

"And whither?"

"I see you are a seaman; I also am a sailor, and was on my way to my vessel when those devils attacked me; come, and be my guest for the night."

As if bewildered, for now that the excitement of the combat was over, the bitter thoughts of the young officer returned with full force—he permitted the man he had rescued to lead him away rapidly from the spot, leaving the wounded man lying on the ground, groaning in agony, and the one he had slain, forever free from suffering, a ghastly companion for the wretch at his side.

Hastily slipping his arm beneath the folds of the officer's cloak, the man led the way rapidly up the river street for a short distance, and then approached a small pier jutting out from the bank.

"Muriel, are you here?" he asked, in a low, stern tone, and in answer, a six-oared cutter approached the pier, having been resting on its oars a short distance from the shore, as if awaiting some one's coming.

"Enter, if you please. There; now, Muriel, shove off, and lads, give way with a will," said the seaman, addressing the young officer; and the two, having sprung into the stern-sheets, the boat was shoved off, the oars were let fall, and with steady and strong strokes the crew bent to their work, and sent the cutter rapidly over the wind-lashed river, the coxswain heading up stream.

"Been unfortunate, sir," said the doorkeeper

Silently the young officer sat in the stern, beside the man whose life he had saved, seemingly brooding so deeply over his own misfortunes as to be wholly indifferent whether he was going, or who was his companion.

"Boat, ahoy!" suddenly hailed a hoarse voice through the darkness, and glancing up, the young officer discovered, just ahead, the dark outline of a vessel lying at anchor in the river.

"*El Cinto de Acero!*" answered the cutter's coxswain, in Spanish, and, interest taking the place of gloomy meditation in the young officer's mind, he said to his companion:

"The Steel Belt is, then, the name of your vessel? There is a schooner of that name in the Mexican service."

"Yes, the Mexican cruiser, Steel Belt, and the one we are now about to board, are one and the same. Come, my brave friend, you are welcome on board *El Cinto de Acero!*"

CHAPTER II.

THE ANGEL OF THE REEFS.

"FATHER in heaven, have mercy upon them!"

"Yes, Claudine, He alone can save them now!"

The speakers were father and daughter; the one a man of noble presence, past the meridian of life, the other a fair young girl of eighteen, with a face redolent of womanly beauty, refinement and intellect, and a form of perfect symmetry and grace.

It was toward the close of an autumn day, a year or more previous to the incidents related in the first chapter of this story, and upon a high promontory of the coast of Maine, that the two, Lord Raphael Vivian and his lovely daughter, Claudine, were standing and gazing with deep interest out over the sea, which was lashed and swept by the fury of the wind, that for twenty-four hours had been blowing a severe gale from the eastward.

The high point of observation upon which stood the father and daughter, was a bold spur, or precipice, jutting out into the ocean, and forming the left bank of one of those romantic but dangerous rock-bound inlets, or bays, so frequent on the coast of Maine.

The cliff was over a hundred feet in height, bold and rugged, an iron sentinel guarding the quiet waters of the land-locked bay, which washed its base.

Upon the point stood a summer-house or lookout, built of rock, and in imitation of some ancient castle of the Rhine, while from its shelter a wild expanse of ocean met the eye, with foaming reefs, rocky islands, and an iron-bound coast, stretching away for miles on either hand.

At the foot of the precipice was a belt of sand, upon which the waves dashed with a heavy roar, and around the prow of the high rock the sandy shore wound into the little bay, whose waters fell with a mimic sound upon the white beach.

In the rear of the look-out the land rolled away for a quarter of a mile toward a heavy forest, in the edge of which loomed up the gray walls of a handsome villa, surrounded on every side with ornamental grounds, and presenting the unmistakable signs of a home of wealth and refinement.

Built upon the model of a baronial homestead in England, the villa was large, rambling and furnished with every luxury, for its noble master, Lord Vivian, had drawn around him, even amid the rugged forests of America, every comfort that had been his indulgence in Old England, ere he left its island shores to seek retirement upon the Western world.

Years and years before, Lord Raphael Vivian had left his English home, and coming to America, had settled down on the coast of Maine, having been struck with the wild beauty and grandeur of its scenery.

Accompanied by an invalid wife, a little daughter of three years, and a dozen English servants, the nobleman had purchased the homestead of an old farmer, and at once devoted himself to its improvement, until in time it became a most lordly estate, and the admiration of the most humble denizens, half-farmer, half-fisherman, that dwelt for miles around.

Of a generous nature, Lord Raphael soon became most popular with all classes of people around him, and his beautiful daughter, Claudine, was beloved for her numerous acts of charity and her loveliness, which won the hearts of the honest country people, who troubled themselves but little with discussing the family affairs up at Sea View Castle, as the estate was

called, so long as the presence in their midst of the English nobleman seemed to benefit their condition.

True, there were whispers regarding the fact that since her arrival in their new home, the Lady Vivian had never been seen, for only the father and daughter ever rode, drove out, or visited together; still, it was said the wife and mother was an invalid, and this accounted for the strange circumstance of her never appearing outside the portal of her room.

A broad gravel walk led from the castle to the look-out on the cliff, upon which stood the father and daughter when introduced to the reader, and to that point the mad roar of the waves, breaking upon the rocky coast, carried the two on that stormy autumn afternoon.

Wrapped securely in heavy shawls, neither Lord Raphael nor Claudine heeded the storm, and were standing awe-struck at its terrible beauty, gazing seaward, when the quick eye of the maiden had caught sight of a small boat some miles from the land, struggling hard to beat away from the dangerous coast and gain an offing outside.

Bounding in the chaos of waters, bending low beneath the gale, and with just sail enough set to steady her, the frail craft was breasting the waves, and striving hard to beat to windward and seaward, for the tempest blew from the ocean.

But in vain the efforts of the gallant crew—in vain the struggles of the little craft, for each wave had hurled them nearer the dreaded shore, and the wild wind pursued them to irresistible ruin.

"Father, they must be saved!" suddenly exclaimed Claudine, after she had uttered the prayer to Heaven for mercy upon them, and her eyes dilated as she drew her form proudly up.

"It is impossible, my daughter; the crew of yonder boat is doomed," sadly replied the nobleman.

"They shall not be lost without an effort to save them. Come, father!" cried the maiden, and without waiting to see if she was followed, she darted swiftly back from the cliff for the distance of several hundred yards, until she came to a narrow road leading down the steep hillside to the beach below.

Down this she flew at the top of her speed, until she suddenly halted on a small pier that jutted out into the waters of the bay, which was sheltered by the rocky arm of the cliff.

Against the pier was moored a small craft, known as a "chebacca-boat" along the New England coast, and used by fishermen in those days from Maine to New Jersey.

This craft, however, though built in the style of the fishing-craft of the coast, was almost seven tons burden, considerably sharper in the bows, with more breadth of beam than was general with her class, and lay gracefully on the water, gently rocking upon the waves.

Aboard, everything was clean and ship-shape, while her cabin was large and most comfortable, for the little Wild Swan was the property of Claudine Vivian, and had been built for her by the special orders of her father, who, a bold seaman himself, was anxious to have his daughter become an expert sailor, and encouraged her in all sports that, though a woman, would make her self-reliant and brave.

Startled by the sudden appearance of the maiden on the pier, several seamen who were upon the deck of the Wild Swan, smoking and listening to the roar of the tempest, sprung to their feet and politely saluted her, while one, a dark, handsome youth of twenty-one stepped forward and raised his hat, while his face colored brightly, as he asked:

"Can I serve you, Lady Claudine?"

"You can, Racine; there is a boat coming ashore on the reefs," answered the maiden, almost out of breath with her long and rapid run.

"Then we will hasten to the beach, and endeavor to drag the crew from the surf. Come boys!" called the young man, who held the position of captain of the chebacca-boat.

"No, hold! that were idle, for none would reach the beach alive! You must save them, Racine."

"Lady Claudine, no boat could live outside, in this blow."

"So you believe; but the trial must be made; so, quickly get the Swan under mainsail and jib close-reefed," commanded Claudine, with startling firmness.

"It were death to us to round yonder cliff, lady," politely responded the young seaman.

"Racine Ney, I came not here to parley, but to act. If you fear to go, I will take the helm,"

angrily said Claudine, and she sprung aboard the Wild Swan and firmly grasped the head of the carved tiller.

In an instant she was followed by the four men who composed the crew, and the young captain, whose face flushed at the words addressed to him by the maiden; but walking toward her he said, in an injured tone:

"Lady Claudine, I fear for you now, not myself, for my life is of little value. Give me the tiller; I will go."

"No, Racine; I will take the helm and go with you. I meant not to wound your feelings, for well do I know you to be a brave man;" and the maiden frankly held forth her hand, which the youth grasped firmly for an instant, and then said, with feeling:

"Now I beg of you to go ashore, lady. See, the men are about to cast loose."

"No, I will go. Now look to the working of the craft," answered Claudine, and seeing that she was firm in her determination, and hesitating but a moment, Racine gave the order to shove off, for the moment that the maiden had sprung on board, the crew had raised the sails, and had all in readiness for starting.

Catching a puff of wind that whirled into the bay through the rocky gateway to the basin, the little craft swung off from the pier, and, with sails trimmed close, stood away for the outlet, each moment increasing her speed as the wind freshened as she neared the entrance to the harbor.

"My daughter! oh, God! what has she done?" suddenly came a cry across the waters, and glancing astern Claudine saw her father standing with outstretched hands upon the pier, the very picture of despair, for he had followed the maiden more slowly down the beach, believing it was her intention only to send the crew of the chebacca-boat to endeavor to save the men who would be driven ashore after their boat struck on the reefs.

But his terror and despair were fearful to contemplate, when he arrived and saw the Wild Swan stretching away for the outlet to the bay, and his daughter standing at the tiller and boldly and skillfully guiding her course.

"Come back! for God's sake return, Claudine, and I will go to their rescue!" cried the nobleman, but, waving her hand in answer, Claudine still held her position, and the little craft, having reached the narrow gorge dividing the bay from the sea, she put her helm down and came about on the other tack, which led directly out into the wild waters, for no longer was she sheltered from the storm. The Wild Swan bent low before the blast and bounded madly in the whirl of the waves, which broke in blinding spray upon her deck.

Unheeding the shrieking wind, that blew her golden tresses in loose and luxurious masses around her, and unmindful of the blinding and drenching spray, Claudine held firmly to the tiller, with Racine near by, and the admiring crew alert and ready to obey her slightest command.

About half a mile to windward, and already within the first line of reefs, but still struggling manfully, the little sail-boat could be seen, knocked madly about by the wind and waves, and drawing nearer and nearer to a rocky barrier, over which the sea dashed with terrific force and a sound like the discharge of heavy artillery.

But skillfully guiding the chebacca-boat through the narrow channel, that wound circuitously through the numerous walls of reefs, Claudine kept her eyes ever on the alert to detect danger to her craft from sunken rocks, for even in the calmest weather the passage-way, from the ocean to the land-locked bay, was most difficult, and few were there on the coast willing to attempt running in or out when a gale was blowing and the waves ran high.

Yet the maiden well knew the channel, and although she had never passed through it in very rough weather she felt confident that she could accomplish the daring feat, if her brave little boat but held up before the gale, and all aboard knew that her nerve would never fail her as long as there was a shadow of hope for success.

"Shall I relieve you at the helm, Lady Claudine? The shalllop needs a man's strength now," politely asked Racine Ney, at the same time laying his hand upon the tiller.

"No, Racine, but you can aid me. Were I to relinquish the tiller, my strength of purpose would fail me, I believe, for most terrible is this scene," answered the maiden, and her eyes swept fearlessly over the foaming waters, and rested on the small boat, which, having been dismasted, was helplessly buffeted about, and

rapidly nearing a wall of reefs, to dash upon which all knew would be instant destruction.

"Ha! see, Racine! They are now helpless, for their mast is gone. Oh, what can we do to save them?" cried the maiden, in a tone of anguish.

The young captain cast his eyes quickly over the waters, then upon the dismasted boat, and answered quickly:

"There is but one chance: to run between the boat and the reef; but it is a desperate risk for the Swan."

"I will take it. I am strong now, Racine, so go forward and get ropes to throw the poor unfortunates, as we pass them."

"Ay, ay, lady," promptly answered Racine, and as he crept forward to obey, he continued to himself:

"She is as plucky as the bravest man I ever saw. By heaven, she should have been a man—no, I forget; for, were she other than she is, I could not love her. Here, lads," he cried, aloud. "Get ropes ready to throw aboard yonder boat, and place yourselves in a position to be of service."

The four men who composed the crew quickly obeyed, and then stood at their posts, alternately eying the drifting boat and their fair young pilot, who grasped the tiller with a strength one would not have believed possible for one so delicately formed, while with unwavering eye and hand, she held on her course.

The positions of both the boat and the Wild Swan were now most critical, for having passed through an opening in one of the inner walls of rock, she was running along parallel with it, and at a distance of only two cables' length, and heading so as to cut off the drifting boat, which, having by accident run through the channel of the outer reef, was helplessly bearing down upon the second, at a point where it would be instant destruction to strike.

Only a quarter of a mile apart was each wall of reefs, and all on board the Wild Swan well knew if they failed to save the crew of the boat while passing them, their fate was sealed for there was no room for the little vessel to do more than put at once about, and make back for the passage through which they had just come.

Realizing fully their danger, and as if comprehending the intention of those on the Wild Swan, the crew of the boat put out their oars and strove hard to stem the irresistible force of wind and wave that was hastening them on to ruin; but in vain their efforts, for steadily they were borne on, and anxious indeed were their glances toward the daring little craft, so nobly attempting their rescue at the risk of self-destruction.

"Racine, if they remain in the boat they will be assuredly lost, for the wind drives it on as rapidly as do the waves."

"True, Lady Claudine; but what can be done?"

"Hail them, and bid them spring into the sea, keeping as close together as possible, and we will run to windward of them."

At once recognizing the correctness of Claudine's intention, Racine faced the boat, and his clear, manly voice rung across the water:

"Ahoy, the boat!"

"Ho, the chebacca-boat!" came the answer, in deep, seaman-like tones, in which there was not the slightest tremor.

"Spring overboard and keep close together—we will pass to windward and throw you lines," cried Racine.

"Ay, ay," returned the same voice, and in obedience to the order, a dozen forms were seen to at once jump into the raging waters, while the boat, lightened of her load, and presenting a larger surface to the wind, dashed on, leaving her former crew struggling in the sea.

Down rushed the Wild Swan, pitching, bending, and rolling far over, but still held on her course, and the next instant was hovering almost above the floating crew.

Racine stood on the sharp bow, rope in hand, and in a loud voice shouted back directions to Claudine how to steer, to prevent the running over of some of the struggling men, and as the prow seemed about to dash into the floating mass of humanity, he cried quickly:

"Let her off—quick! Steady, as you are, lady! Now, men!" and as he spoke, he cast his rope out upon the waters, and his example was at once followed by his companions, while Claudine, seeing that the little vessel was forging rapidly ahead, cried, in ringing tones, as she put her helm hard down:

"Let fly the jib! Stand ready there at the main sheet!"

The bows of the chebacca-boat swung slowly

around obedient to her helm, and feeling the wind upon the other quarter she lay far over beneath its pressure ere she moved on once more, but the presence of wind and skill of the daring helmswoman had been the means of saving the life of nearly every one of the shipwrecked crew, for it had given Racine and his companions time to draw them aboard the Wild Swan; yet several poor unfortunates, unable to reach the vessel, sunk beneath the waters, or were hurled away and dashed upon the reef, as had been the fate of their boat a moment before.

The crew that had been so miraculously saved from death, were an officer and ten men dressed in the uniform of the United States navy, and being once more in safety, they set to work with professional promptness to aid in the management of the little schooner.

The officer, a young man whose handsome face and splendid form were evident in spite of his sea-drenched appearance, walked quickly aft as if to aid at the helm, but started back with a flushed and surprised face when his eyes fell upon the beautiful pilot whose fair hands so firmly grasped the tiller.

"What a woman has been the daring commander of this gallant craft?

"Lady, I owe you my life, and the lives of my men," and raising the dripping cap from his head the young officer bent low before the beautiful girl, who, even at that moment, could not but feel the fascination of the earnest eyes beat upon her.

Quickly recovering from a momentary confusion, Claudine remarked:

"I am happy to have saved the lives of your self and crew; but, sir, we are yet in great danger, and I will ask you to aid me."

Instantly the young officer grasped the tiller, and begging Claudine to relinquish it to him, she did so, while, standing by his side, she directed him how to steer through the dangerous channel leading back to the bay, and under her guidance, and the strong and steady hand of the young sailor, the Wild Swan retraced her perilous way, and just at nightfall ran alongside the pier, where she was met by Lord Raphael and a large crowd of country people, who, in admiring dread, had watched the noble rescue, and with loud cheers greeted the return of the lovely pilot, upon whom they at once bestowed the well-earned title of the "Angel of the Reefs."

CHAPTER III.

THE BOY PILOT.

UPON the steep, forest-clad hillside of the New Jersey Highlands, which look far seaward over the white girdle of land, known as Sandy Hook, can yet be seen the ruins of an old cabin, which over half a century ago was the humble home of Enoch Ellis, a pilot.

In those days vessels from every port in the world did not, as nowadays, throng New York harbor, and hence Enoch Ellis was not constantly cruising at sea, in search of incoming ships, but was wont to sit in his cabin door, glass in hand, watching the wide expanse of ocean for an approaching sail, when, if it was coming up the coast, he would descend the steep hillside of the Highlands, and springing into a small skiff, row across the Shrewsbury, cross the belt of sand that separated the river from the ocean and bay, and launching a stanch surf-boat he kept on the beach for the purpose, would put off for the haven-bound craft.

If the vessel appeared coming down the coast, the pilot would go aboard a small sloop, anchored under the shadow of the Highlands, and hoisting sail would run across the bay, round Sandy Hook, and stand out to meet the craft he was to guide up to New York city.

Enoch Ellis was an Englishman, with an education and refinement above the calling he followed, and with his wife, a delicately beautiful woman of hardly more than twenty, and an infant, had come to America, and settled in that, then, lonely Highland home, the husband doing the duties of a pilot, and cultivating the few acres of land that surrounded his cabin, and the wife attending dutifully to her housekeeping, though appearing ever sad, with her large dreamy eyes and thoughtful face.

A year had the pilot lived in his new home, surrounded by many comforts, and apparently enjoying his lonely life, when, one afternoon, as he sat in the doorway gazing seaward, his eye suddenly fell upon a small object miles away, drifting slowly with the tide.

Hastily descending the pathway to the river, he was soon on board his little sloop, and flying over the bay before a fair breeze.

Rounding Sandy Hook he squared away for

the object that had attracted his gaze from the bluff, and in half an hour ran alongside a ship's cutter, adrift upon the wide sea, and containing two persons, a man of apparently fifty, with a kindly face, but upon which rested an expression of deepest suffering, and a boy of eight, a handsome, brave-looking lad, whose pinched features and hollow eyes bore the same hungry look that was upon his companion's.

"Ahoy, my friends! what do you here?" exclaimed the pilot, in kind tones, as he brought his sloop up into the wind, and hauled the cutter alongside.

"We are dying of hunger. Thank God! you have come, and the boy's life will be saved," said the man, faintly.

"I will save the lives of both of you, if good food and tender nursing can do it. Cheer up, and lend a hand in coming aboard," cried Enoch.

"Save the boy, care for him; I need no aid now, for my sands of life are ebbing fast."

"Tut, tut, my man, both you and your son—"

"He is not my son; but—"

"Well, we'll not argue that point, but to work," and so saying the kind young pilot raised the form of the dying man—for he had told the truth; aid for him had come too late—and placed him tenderly upon the sloop's deck, after which he aided the boy, who was much stronger than his companion, to get on board.

Then, taking the cutter in tow, he seized his helm and rapidly sailed homeward.

But, ere the shadow of the Highlands fell upon the little craft, the shadow of death rested there, for the dying man had ceased to breathe, sinking from life into eternity without a groan or struggle.

When at length the sloop dropped anchor, Enoch raised the boy in his strong arms, and carried him up to his cabin, where he placed him in the hands of his wife, who tenderly cared for the little waif.

Days and weeks of sickness and delirium followed, however, for the strong constitution of the boy had been undermined by hunger and suffering, until his frame was worn down by disease.

But the tender care of Enoch and his wife brought the little fellow back to life; and, as though the past was but a fearful dream to him, he asked no questions of his kind benefactors, but dropped into a quiet existence that each day ripened into deeper interest in the pilot, his wife, and the humble cabin home.

Enoch had buried the dead man in a quiet spot on the Highlands, and from a diary found in the boat, together with a bag containing two hundred pounds of English gold, he learned that the two had been passengers in the clipper ship Vixen, bound from Liverpool to New York, and which, in a violent gale, had been wrecked and the crew forced to take to the boats.

The diary had been faithfully kept until hunger had unmoved the hand of the writer; and Enoch read how, day after day passed, and one after the other of the occupants of the boat had died and been thrown into the sea, until only two remained—the keeper of the record and the boy, for whom he seemed to have a most binding affection, although he said he was not his son.

But there was no clew as to who the youth was, and Enoch sought none, for he had taken a great fancy, and so had his wife, to the little waif, and both were anxious to have him remain with them.

Seven years passed away and the waif, who had said his name was Harold Marmaduke, still remained at the pilot's cabin, and at fifteen had become a most expert and daring sailor, for Enoch had made him his constant companion in all of his cruises, on the coast, seaward and up to New York, where he went once a month after provisions for his little household.

In his humble home Harold seemed content and happy, and devoted to the little Aline Ellis, grown from the tiny infant into a lovely girl of eight, and who looked upon Hal, as she called him, as peculiarly her own property, claiming his whole time when he was not absent with the pilot.

It was a strange household in that lonely cabin home, for Enoch, though loving his wife with a kind of holy adoration, appeared to act toward her as though she was in every respect his superior, and treated her with marked deference, while in his eyes there rested always a look of sadness, as though some bygone bitter memory haunted his life, while the quiet, beautiful and sad-looking woman, ever kind, ever gentle toward her husband, seemed as though bound to him by a tie she would give her life to sever, and though acting thoroughly a mother's part to-

ward Aline, there was, in her tones and look, none of that motherly fondness for the lovely child, yet, toward Harold, she exhibited even more affection.

With Enoch it was also the same, for seldom did little Aline win from him a look of love, though he forced toward her a kindly manner, while, when alone with Harold, the cold bearing of the strong man would melt, and he would appear wholly different.

Not having children acquaintance near them, to make comparisons with their lives, neither Harold nor Aline noticed the undercurrent of coldness in Enoch and his wife; still it existed, though every effort was made to make the children happy, and with success.

One day Enoch was taken down with fever, and, as night came on, he became delirious, so that Harold was forced to ride through a blinding storm to see a physician, residing miles away.

Returning with the man of medicine, about midnight, Harold was startled to see, as he reached the cabin door, a bright light illuminate the sea, and immediately after, borne upon the shrieking wind, came the deep roll of a heavy gun.

Ushering the doctor into the sick-room, Harold hastily darted down the river-path, the deep boom of the gun still ringing in his ears, and was soon on board the little sloop.

Hastily reefing the mainsail, and hoisting it, he raised his anchor, and in ten minutes after the first gun was fired, was flying across the bay in the direction of Sandy Hook, upon the low point of which glimmered a faint gleam from the lighthouse.

It was a terrible night, and the waves ran high; but, undaunted, the brave boy stood on, his little craft swept fore and aft with water, and pitching and rolling fearfully.

But Harold knew his craft, that had once been a large life-boat, which Enoch had decked over and rigged as a sloop, and well had he learned to manage her in the roughest seas, hence he felt little fear, and bravely shaped his course across the wild waters toward a large vessel of war, as shown by the flash of her signal-guns for a pilot, that was struggling with the gale, under only her storm stay-sails.

The flash of her guns directed Harold how to steer, for it was so dark that otherwise the vessel was invisible, and his approach was not discernible, lying low as did his little craft in the water, until all on board the man-of-war were startled by a hail in a clear but boyish voice.

"Ay, ay; who hails?" cried an officer through his trumpet, as he sprung into the mizzen shrouds.

"If you will bring your vessel into the wind and lay to, I will beat up and come under her stern," cried Harold in distinct tones.

"Ay, ay; by Jove that fellow, boy though his voice betokens him, knows what he's about," cried the ship's commander, as he turned to his officers and gave the necessary orders for laying to.

In a few moments the frigate was lying-to under three topsails and fore-staysail, and ploughing bows under as the wind and waves pressed upon her.

A stern, and partially protected by the huge hull, was the sloop, struggling toward the ship, which, after a while, it approached near enough, for Harold to catch a stout line thrown him.

Instantly giving it a turn around the hal-yard cleats forward, the youth lowered his sail with lightning rapidity, and soon had it securely furled and all ship-shape aboard his little craft.

Then another line was thrown him from the frigate's deck, and when this was also firmly secured, Harold, with the agility of a cat, intrusted himself to the rope, and hand-over-hand ascended rapidly to the deck of the man-of-war, where he was warmly greeted by the commander and his officers, who gazed with surprised admiration upon the youthful, daring face, and slender, but agile form.

"Well, my lad," said the commander, as the light from the battle-lanterns fell upon Harold, "you are a youthful pilot certainly, to trust one of Uncle Sam's frigates to, but your courage and skill have already been proven in coming out to us in this gale; so bear a hand at the wheel and run us in, for our good ship has sprung a leak and is settling fast."

"Ay, ay, sir; I will run you under the lee of Sandy Hook to-night, and to-morrow will pilot you up to the city, for did you go on now you could gain no advantage, and in quiet water your pumps will be more effective."

"You speak like a seaman and a sage. Take the wheel; the ship I trust in your hands, though I would go on to-night, if possible."

"To come to your aid, sir, in answer to your guns, I left the bedside of a man who has been to me more than a father has ever been, and mayhap he is dying."

"Noble as well as brave, you are, my boy, and I will come to anchor under the lee of the Hook, and allow you to return to your father's bedside," said the commander, kindly.

"I will take my sloop, when the frigate is safe, sir, and run across home. I will be gone only a few hours, and in the morning will pilot you up to the city," and so saying Harold Marmaduke became all attention to his dangerous duty; but with skill and daring he guided the noble vessel on her course, and in little more than an hour after he had boarded her, the anchor was dropped in comparatively calm water, for the sandy arm of the Hook broke the force of the wind and waves.

As soon as the frigate was riding quietly, Harold sprung into his little sloop, which had towed safely astern, and raising his sail sped away for the anchorage under the Highlands.

He found upon his arrival at the cabin, that Enoch was better, having been soothed by an opiate given him by the physician, who was still with him; but that Mrs. Ellis and little Aline were greatly distressed at his own absence, and fearful for his safety, for the little maiden had gone forth in the storm and had seen his sloop making for the frigate.

After an hour passed at the cabin, Harold again returned on board the sloop, promising Mrs. Ellis to be back as soon as possible, and just as day began to break he ran alongside the majestic frigate, whose officers and crew were hard at work with the pumps, and busy getting up the anchor, for they had observed the lad's approach.

"Well, my daring young pilot, you are as good as your word; you are welcome," said Captain Moreton, receiving him at the gangway, and grasping his hand warmly, for he had taken a great fancy to the brave boy.

"Yes, sir, and we can get under way at once, for the wind has shifted to the south-east and will drive us up the harbor in fine style," answered Harold, glancing seaward, landward, and then over the rigging of the ship with the eye of a thorough sailor.

Two hours passed, and the United States vessel of war was safely moored in the docks, having been guided skillfully into port by the daring young pilot, who, as soon as the ship was safe, turned to depart.

"Here, my brave boy, take this purse, besides your regular fee, for it has been made up for you by my officers and men, as a token of their appreciation of your courage and skill," and Captain Moreton extended toward Harold a purse filled with bright gold.

"No, captain, I cannot accept the gold, nor will I take a fee for pilotage; for our country's vessels, neither my adopted father nor myself ever charge for our services," and the youth drew back.

"Patriotic indeed are you, and I would that some of the vampires who live off our Government would pattern after you; but this is nonsense—refuse the fee, if you will, but take the purse."

"No, sir; I will not take gold for what I have done," answered the youth, firmly, while he glanced around upon the assembled officers and men, all of whom were regarding him with admiration.

"Is there any way in which I can serve you? If so, speak, for you have rendered us all, and our Government, great service, this past night."

"Yes, Captain Moreton, you may be of service to me. I do not care to pass my days as a pilot; I am ambitious, and would serve in the navy, even though I enter as a cabin-boy—"

"And rise to the quarter-deck, which you would do by your own exertions; I understand. Yes, my brave boy, I can serve you, and within two weeks you shall have a midshipman's warrant on board this frigate; so return here within that time," and Captain Moreton extended his hand warmly, called the steward, bade him fill the little sloop with wine and delicacies for the sick pilot at home, and half an hour after, Harold took his departure from the frigate, followed by three hearty cheers from her crew, whom he had so nobly served.

Harold Marmaduke returned to his cabin home, and for days watched by the bedside of the man who had so kindly befriended him, until, after a while, a change came, and Enoch Ellis was himself again.

Then the youth made known to him, and to Mrs. Ellis and Aline, the good fortune that had overtaken him in the promise of a midshipman's berth in the navy.

"I congratulate you, Harold, upon your good luck, and you enter under fine auspices," said Enoch, kindly.

"Yes, sir; I know it will be greatly to my advantage, and it makes me feel elated to think that my own exertions gained for me the appointment that Judge Montclair's influence only gained for his son by hard work," answered Harold.

"True; the judge had to work hard to get that wild boy of his into the service, and I fear me, young Montclair will come to no good end," returned Enoch, who never had liked Judge Montclair and his family, who lived a few miles up the Highlands, toward Middletown, and, on account of their wealth, looked down upon poor people and the humble pilot. Nay, more—on several occasions, when Harold had visited the village near the Montclair mansion, the young scion of wealth and respectability, Lennox Montclair, had insulted the youth, by asking him if he was a wise enough child to know who were his parents.

Harold knew that the neighborhood were acquainted with his story, and quickly resented the implied aspersions cast on him by the rich boy, he promptly knocking him down, and giving him a severe thrashing, which at once brought down upon him the ill-will of the neighbors, for gold carries the day openly, though in secret its worshipers may act differently.

A few weeks before the illness of Enoch Ellis, young Montclair, who was a year the senior of Harold, had received an appointment in the navy, and had gone on a foreign cruise; but now it was the young pilot's time to rejoice, for his own exertions had won for him a commission.

Promptly at the time appointed, Harold was on board the frigate at New York, having run up in the sloop with Enoch, who was to carry it back; and, true to his word, Captain Moreton presented the youth with his midshipman's warrant, and a gold medal from the officers and crew of the vessel, in token of their esteem of his courage and skill, and the service rendered them.

Bidding adieu to his adopted father, who, with a saddened heart, set sail homeward, Harold donned the uniform of the navy, and at once commenced his duties on board the frigate, which a few days after sailed to make war upon Tripolitan pirates, her new officer taking the wheel and piloting her down the harbor, through the narrows, across the lower bay and around Sandy Hook, out to sea.

CHAPTER IV. LOVE AND RIVALRY.

NINE years went by after the sailing of the frigate on board of which was Harold Marmaduke, and in that time the youth had but once visited the cabin home on the Highlands.

Not that he had ceased to remember that, to him, dear old home. Oh no—its inmates were ever present in his thoughts when far away from his native land, and he sincerely regretted that duty kept his ship in other seas, for years at a time.

Once his vessel put into the port of New York, after a five-years' absence, running in one dark, blustering night, with Harold at the wheel, for his hand had not lost its cunning in pilotage, and ere day broke he was on his way, in the gig, down to the home of Enoch, giving them a joyful surprise at breakfast to have him enter unannounced.

It was the same old home, though improved considerably, with comfortable rooms, far seaview, and rolling acres around it. Enoch and his wife were still the same quiet people, contented, but with a secret shadow of the past hanging over their lives; but Aline! five years had changed her from the girl of eight to the budding maiden of thirteen, with raven-black, fiery eyes, that would flash vividly or melt in languor, and a form breaking forth into true womanly loveliness.

Almost shut out from the world, and relying only upon the company of Enoch and his wife, and for amusement, on her sail-boat and skiff, for she was an expert with both the tiller and oars, Aline had grown up almost wild, for still an icy wall seemed to separate her from her parents, who, excepting teaching her daily in books and household duties, appeared to greatly neglect her.

Though the maiden felt not this icy barrier, the quick eye of Harold noticed it, and the youth wondered at the mystery, for his ming-

ling with the world had made him a reader of human nature, and he felt that some dark secret of the past divided the lives of the inmates of the cabin.

Grown from the boy of fifteen to the tall, finely-formed young man of twenty, wearing upon his shoulder the rank of lieutenant, it is no wonder that the handsome Harold won anew the hearts of Enoch, his wife, and Aline, the latter appearing to almost worship him with her fiery, passionate nature, and refusing to be comforted when duty called him back to his ship, after a month's stay.

Again Harold sailed for foreign seas, and four more years dragged their length along, ere his vessel turned her prow "homeward bound," and with orders to cruise down the coast of Maine, surveying the shores, and finding out all possible harbors of refuge, for the mutterings of a coming war-tempest were heard; the memorable year to Americans of 1812 was at hand, and it was necessary to prepare for action against a most formidable adversary.

Harold Marmaduke, by his seamanship, courage and attention to duties, had ascended the ladder of promotion to the rank of first lieutenant and executive officer of his vessel, and when the Maine coast had been sighted, on her homeward cruise, Commander Moreton had dispatched his protege—for he had always looked upon the youth as such—to survey the line of coast, taking with him the frigate's pinnace and full crew.

The reader has seen how the cutter and her crew came to grief on the inhospitable coast, driven upon the reefs by the violent storm, that had been bravely battled against by Claudine Vivian and her chebacca-boat, in her endeavor, aided by Racine Ney and his courageous sailors, to save the doomed craft.

Also, the reader has witnessed the triumph of the daring "Angel of the Reefs," and the rescue of Harold Marmaduke and his men, who were warmly greeted by Lord Vivian, as soon as he had infolded again and again to his heart his noble daughter, chiding and praising her in the same breath.

"Lieutenant Marmaduke, I am happy to greet you, sir, even though you are cast up by the sea, for your name is known to me, and I may say to the world, as one of the daring crew of the Intrepid, who burned the frigate Philadelphia, in the war with Tripoli; you are welcome, sir," and Lord Vivian held forth his hand and led Harold toward the mansion, where he was soon made most comfortable, while his men were cared for by Racine and his crew on board the Wild Swan.

Several days passed and still Harold lingered a guest at Sea View Castle, and though he felt that duty called him away, and that he should have gone at once to Boston, where his ship was to await him, he could not make up his mind to leave the presence of Claudine Vivian, who had thrown around him a chain of love never to be broken.

Owing his life to the maiden, it is not to be wondered at that Harold loved the beautiful creature, whom he felt was not really indifferent to his regard for her, as indeed she was not, for Claudine had taken a strange interest in her protege, as she playfully called him, while his fascinations of manner and person completely won her girlish heart.

Lord Vivian noted this germ of love between the two, and with a father's jealous eye, watched them closely, determined to warn his daughter not to too willingly bestow her heart upon one who, though standing high as an officer and gentleman, nothing was known regarding his inner life.

Appreciating Harold's noble qualities, and taking a great fancy to him, Lord Vivian was delighted to entertain him as long as he would be his guest at Sea View Castle; but then, as a lover for his daughter, there was the old prejudice against Americans and republican plebeians, which the nobleman could not brook, with his aristocratic title and wealth.

Again, Harold was poor, with nothing but his pay and a few hundreds he had saved up, and Claudine was of noble birth and an heiress.

Harold thought over these facts more diligently than did Lord Vivian, and with more at heart than had the nobleman, for he felt that to lose Claudine was to give up every hope in life.

Thus another week passed, one of storm along the coast, and it would have been madness for Harold to put to sea in the chebacca-boat, which Claudine had placed at his service to convey himself and crew to Boston.

Chess, a game of whist, reading, sword-practice between Lord Vivian and Harold, both

whom were expert swordsmen, reading aloud, many a *tete-a-tete* in the library between the young people, and music served to cause the week of bad weather to glide by, far too rapidly for Harold, alas!

Yet that week settled the question, for Harold told his love and learned with delight that he was loved in return; then came the disagreeable part of love-making—the asking of a parent for property you already consider as your own, and that you have the best right to; but with a brave face, yet heavier heart than he had ever known in battle, Harold skirmishes around the citadel of the nobleman's regard, and then charged boldly to the front and asked for Claudine's hand, when he should have attained a captain's rank.

Lord Vivian listened patiently, his face wearing a serious expression, and was about to reply, when the servant ushered into the room two gentlemen, clad in the United States naval uniform.

"Pardon me until another time, Mr. Marmaduke," said Lord Vivian, quietly, and then rising he advanced toward the strangers and said, pleasantly:

"Gentlemen, you are welcome to Sea View Castle. I am Lord Raphael Vivian."

"And I am Captain Courtney, of the United States sloop-of-war, Ambuscade. This gentleman, my lord, is my lieutenant, Mr. Montclair," and Captain Courtney presented the officer with him.

Seeing that, although in the same service, they appeared unacquainted with each other, Lord Vivian introduced Harold to Captain Courtney, who bowed stiffly, and his lieutenant, who remarked, sneeringly:

"An introduction is unnecessary, my lord; I knew the gentleman with the aristocratic name when he was a simple fisher lad."

Harold Marmaduke's face grew crimson, and then became white as marble; after nine long years he stood face to face with his old enemy, Lennox Montclair.

At first the young officer seemed about to return some bitter remark, but checking his words, he simply bowed and walked from the room, while Captain Courtney remarked:

"That, then, is your old acquaintance, Lennox? A splendid-looking man, and one who has proven himself a brave one. What a pity so dark a cloud hangs over his life."

"Indeed, captain; has any misfortune befallen my young friend, Marmaduke?" said Lord Vivian, anxiously.

"Yes, my lord; he was so unfortunate as to have neither father nor mother to claim him and name him, and was brought up as a waif by a man, half fisherman and half-pilot, on the Jersey coast," replied Lieutenant Montclair.

"Indeed! Can this be true, Captain Courtney?"

"So Montclair says, and he should know, as the two were boys together. It is indeed a misfortune, for though I never met Marmaduke before, I have felt a deep interest in him, ever since I first heard of his gallantry as an officer."

"Oh! he's plucky, as I well remember; nevertheless, it is true what I say regarding him, and it is a disgrace to our service to have an officer in it with a stain upon his family escutcheon."

"How did he, an unknown, get into the navy, Lieutenant?" asked Lord Vivian, thoughtfully.

"He was, as I told you, a fisher lad, and a pilot, and one stormy night piloted a frigate into port, when she was in danger of being lost."

"A plucky deed, too, for I heard of it, I now remember," said the nobleman.

"Yes, but he knew the waters well, and was in a life-boat. Anyhow he was made a midshipman for the act, it not being then known that he was of nameless birth."

"Gentlemen, I fear I have neglected my duty as a host; pray let me call servants to see you to your rooms, and in an hour we will have dinner," said, abruptly, Lord Vivian, as though he would change the subject.

"Thank you, my lord; a fisherman of whom we bought a mess of fish from off your villa, informed us a pinnace-load of seamen had been wrecked here, some days since, so I put in to see if I could serve them in any way, and my vessel lies near. Marmaduke is then the man."

"Yes; it was his intention to leave to-morrow, the storm having detained him, in a small vessel. I placed at the disposal of himself and crew."

"He need not trouble you, for I will carry him to Boston, whither I am bound."

On saying, Captain Courtney and his lieutenant turned and followed the servants awaiting to show them to their rooms, leaving Lord Vivian alone and distressed at what he had heard.

Pacing the floor in deep meditation for some moments, he murmured:

"Yes, my course is plain; he must depart at once, for already is she wholly wrapped up in him. A strange feeling of interest draws me to him. I would it were otherwise."

Seizing his hat the nobleman left the library and walked rapidly in the direction of the cliff.

Seated in the summer-house were two persons, Harold and Claudine. The latter weeping, for her lover had just been telling her of his life—that he was a waif cast up by the sea.

"Lieutenant Marmaduke, it was cruel of you to deceive me, and win the love of that young and innocent girl, under the pretense that you could hold your life and actions up among honorable men," and Lord Vivian spoke sternly.

"Sir! Lord Vivian! upon my character rests no stain of dishonor; yet upon my life rests a mystery, I would to God I could solve, if only for my own sake."

"The mystery of my life I would have told you had not Captain Courtney's arrival prevented."

"I know all, sir; hereafter our paths through life divide, and poor Claudine must remember you only as an unhappy dream flitting across her heart."

"No, father! Lord Vivian! I am no child to forget, or let sorrows come and go like April storms. I too know all, and upon Harold Marmaduke rests no blame: no, our paths through life run not apart, but meet in the end and be as one, adown which we shall journey together unto the end—"

"Claudine! foolish girl, you know not how idly you talk. Mr. Marmaduke, the chebacca-boat is at your service, and Captain Courtney has offered yourself and men passage to Boston. You can take your choice."

"Lord Vivian, already am I under obligations to you which I can never repay, and no other favor can I accept at your hands, while I can, as my right, demand my transportation for myself and crew at the hand of a Government vessel."

"I will go in the sloop-of-war, and at once call my men and go aboard. Stay! one favor I will ask—it is to see Lady Claudine for one short moment."

Lord Vivian frowned, hesitated, and then said, in a kindly tone:

"Mr. Marmaduke, through life I wish you well; there is a war brewing between this country and England, and you will doubtless serve America well during the struggle."

"Claudine, I will await you in the library."

So saying Lord Vivian bowed to Harold and walked away, leaving the youth and maiden together, neither of whom knew how bitter indeed was the charge lying against Harold's honor.

Need we dwell upon those few holy moments of parting?

No, let us not intrude upon a farewell, bitter indeed, between two hearts wrapped up in each other and bowed down with sorrow; but only say that Claudine declared that she would leave home, parents, all, to follow Harold to the uttermost parts of the earth.

"Not now, sweet; wait a while, and the time will come, I hope, when I can clear myself of any charge against me, and our skies will be sunny once more."

"Two sacred missions have I to perform: first to serve my country in her coming struggle, and second, to endeavor to discover my parentage, for not until now did I feel the crushing weight of being fatherless, motherless, and unknown in the world."

The lovers parted, and an hour after Harold Marmaduke and his crew were on board the sloop-of-war, where they were most kindly received.

But the serpent of hatred invaded there, for during the evening a letter came aboard in a shore-boat, from the sloop's lieutenant, and when Harold ascended to the deck the following morning, he found the "cold-shoulder" turned toward him by all of his brother officers.

Three days passed, and still the sloop-of-war remained at anchor, her commander and lieutenant ashore, and the lonely Harold a prey to bitterest feelings, an outcast, as it were, from his fellow-men.

At length Captain Courtney and Lieutenant Montclair came aboard, accompanied by Lord Vivian and Lady Claudine, who were to be shown over the vessel, and lunch with the commander.

They came in the chebacca-boat, and Harold, observing them from the gun-port in his state-room, noticed that Claudine was paler than when he last saw her, and that her eyes wander-

ed searching around as if looking, he hoped for him.

Lennox Montclair did the honors gracefully, and with triumphant look that was not lost on Harold, who closely watched his every action toward Claudine.

In his lonely state-room the young officer heard the tramp overhead, the pleasant conversation, and presently the sound of laughter and song from the captain's cabin, and a groan arose to his lips as he listened to the flute-like voice of Claudine, floating in melody through the verses of his favorite ballad, and one they had often sung together.

"Oh! God! she has forgotten me—so soon, so soon!"

"Lieutenant Marmaduke!"

Harold started as the voice broke on his ear, and turning toward the open port saw the head and shoulders of Racine Ney, the young captain of the chebacca-boat, which, having dropped back from the gangway was lying alongside the vessel.

Smothering down his feelings, he said, pleasantly:

"Well, Ney, I am glad to see you. Will you come aboard and take a glass with me?"

"No, thank you, sir. The guard told me, you were not well, and that this port looked into your state-room, so I dropped the yacht back until I got a glimpse of you. Here is a package for you."

Eagerly taking the package held forth to him, Harold was about to thank the bearer, when the sentinel hailed, and bade Racine haul the yacht to the gangway.

"Good-by, lieutenant, and success attend you, sir," cried Racine, as he obeyed.

Clutching close his packet, Harold watched the departure of the Wild Swan, until it disappeared from sight in the bay, and then, as the sound of the boatswain's whistle summoned "all hands to weigh anchor," he broke the seal, and examined the contents inclosed.

First was a long, golden curl, a yard in length; then an ivory miniature of Claudine, set in a case of gold and pearls; then followed a long and closely-written letter, which Harold read and re-read with deepest interest.

"I was unjust; she has not forgotten me; but this deep mystery she speaks of, I would to God I could explain, or understand, for there are points in her letter I cannot solve. Bless her for these tokens of her regard, and I'll ever keep them near me."

So saying Harold Marmaduke bestowed one long glance at the receding shores of Maine and ascended to the deck, where, though greeted kindly by Captain Courtney, he was "cut" by Lennox Montclair and the other officers.

It was a long run to Boston, short as was the distance, for head-winds and rough seas had to be faced; but at length the port was reached late one night, and Harold in the morning awoke from troubled slumbers, to find the ship at anchor, and but a short distance from his own vessel, the noble frigate Portsmouth, whose quarter-deck he knew so well.

CHAPTER V.

ADRIFT IN THE WORLD.

As soon as he had made his toilet, Harold went on board his frigate, after thanking Captain Courtney for his kindness to him.

What was his surprise to find that the same cold manner greeted him from his brother officers, that had been shown him on board the Ambuscade.

"Lieutenant Lyle, can I ask where Commodore Moreton is?" said Harold to the junior lieutenant, who had merely coldly bowed to him.

"He has gone to his home for a visit of a few days, sir."

"Who is in command of the frigate?"

"I am."

"Then I relieve you of that duty. Left the commodore no word for me?"

"None; we all believed you lost, until the arrival of the Ambuscade this morning, when Lieutenant Montclair came aboard and informed us to the contrary."

"He has been aboard! To his visit, then, is owing the coldness with which my former friends have received me?"

"It is, sir; and, Lieutenant Marmaduke, although you are my superior officer, and I must obey orders from you, I hope you will pardon me, if I speak plainly and suggest that you resign from a service in which you can no longer hold the regard of either officers or seamen."

"This to me, sir! by heavens! you shall explain! At once tell me what I have done, to be thus insulted and shunned by those I deemed my friends?"

"You cannot be ignorant, lieutenant; in fact, I am told you have known, since your boyhood, that you were of ignoble birth."

Harold Marmaduke staggered backward a few paces, then quickly recovered himself, and stood like one spell-bound, so great had been the shock upon him.

Now he understood all—the treatment of Lord Vivian, the coldness of his brother officers, and the mystery in Claudine's letter.

Could he deny the assertion regarding his birth?

No; for little did he remember of his earlier years.

Might not Enoch have kept from him knowledge he had gained regarding him, and it have become known to others?

Yes, it might be true; but with abhorrence he turned from the thought.

"No, I will not, cannot believe it; I will not wrong those who were my parents, and, maybe, still live, by such a thought.

"Yet, my unbelief does not affect my former friends, of whom this man before me is a specimen. Out upon such honor, such a creed, that visits the sins of the parent upon the children.

"She, then, knows all, and is true.

"Thank God for that; but, who has done me this wrong? Who is my enemy?

"Ah! well I know. It is Lennox Montclair, who, from words I have heard dropped, has dared to rival me in love.

"Well, I have but one course, and that is to leave a service where I have lost caste, and where I was striving for rank and fame.

"Then adieu to every high hope, for the present, to every ambitious dream, until I solve the mystery overhanging my life like a dark cloud. I'll bide my time until in the end I triumph over my enemies."

"Lieutenant Lyle," and Harold turned from his deep and painful meditations to the lieutenant, who had been regarding him silently.

"Sir."

"You will keep command of the Portsmouth, and in your hands I will leave papers for you to give personally to Captain Moreton.

"I intend resigning my commission at once, and leaving the service."

"It is the best thing you could do, lieutenant."

"Silence, sir! I asked not for your opinion in the matter, and be wary how you express yourself, else I may leave my mark upon you.

"Within the hour I leave this frigate, and I may say now, without regret, as I find it is officered by such creatures as yourself.

"Until I leave I shall retain command."

Leaving the abashed lieutenant, Harold descended to his state-room, and soon packed together his traps, after which he entered the commodore's cabin, and wrote his instant resignation from the service; then he addressed a long and kind letter to his commander, telling him his reasons for quitting the navy, and thanking him for the numerous kindnesses shown him.

When all was finished he ascended to the deck, and his brother officers recoiled from the look of stern resolve and anger that rested upon his face.

"Mr. Lyle."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the lieutenant politely touched his cap, for he saw something in the look of his superior officer he dreaded.

"Send the steward into my state-room for my luggage, and have the gig piped alongside."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and in a few moments all was in readiness for his departure, when the coxswain of the pinnace that had been wrecked, stepped forward, and saluting, said, politely:

"May it please you, lieutenant, I have a consort in this port, that has sailed with me, off and on, for twenty years, and she may learn of the loss of the pinnace and think me dead, and her peepers spring aleak, and grief throw her on her beam-ends; so I would like to go ashore and have the old woman get me in ship-shape again, for I ain't quite as good as I was before we was cast away."

"All right, Morris. I'll go and write you a leave," and Harold returned to the cabin, and soon came back with the necessary paper, signed by himself as commanding officer of the Portsmouth.

"Get your togs and go ashore in the gig with me. You have a leave of ten days."

"And for a longer cruise than that, or I'm mistaken," muttered the coxswain to himself, while he said aloud: "Thank you, lieutenant, and bless you, sir, is the word that goes with you from all of us forward, for if we are common seamen, sir, we can all see that when you go over the frigate's side, she has lost her best spar."

The words had not left the coxswain's lips, when a voice cried aloud from forward:

"Three cheers for Lieutenant Marmaduke, who is always on deck in danger, and never went back on a friend, in the forecastle or cabin."

Instantly there arose from the frigate's crew three deep, heartfelt cheers, for Harold was dearly loved by the men, as he had been by the officers until that day.

The handsome face crimsoned at the compliment paid him, and the eyes burned brighter, as Harold raised his gold-bordered cap and bowed to the crew in kind acknowledgment.

Without a salute to the assembled officers, who felt chagrined at the act of the crew, Harold stepped over the side into the gig awaiting, and taking his seat in the stern sheets, as he glanced up toward Lieutenant Lyle, who, in a fever of anxiety, was watching him, for he feared his ambitious desire to be left in command of the frigate might be frustrated, said:

"Lieutenant Lyle, I leave you in command of the frigate. When Commodore Morton returns, be careful to place in his hands the papers I have left for him. Give way, men!"

Without another word, Harold Marmaduke left the vessel that had so long been his home.

Arriving at the pier, he dismissed the gig, the crew bidding him God-speed, for the men had heard from some meddlesome-tongued midshipman the cause of their officer's departure, and one and all sympathized with him.

"Well, Morris, it seems you have brought considerable luggage, for a few days' stay," said Harold, as he looked around for a porter to carry his traps, and his eye fell on the effects of the coxswain.

"True for you, sir; but, lieutenant, can I speak a word of my mind to you, sir?"

"Yes; what is it, lad?"

"Well, you see, sir, the boys all know why you left the frigate, 'cause you never had any grandfather or grandmother. Now, don't turn so red, sir, for I didn't aim to breeze up your tender feelings, sir."

"Go on, Morris."

"I will, sir; well, you see, sir, I have been on yonder frigate many years, and was aboard when you, a youngster then, took us all out of a mighty tight place, and says I to myself to-day, when I heard you was going to leave us—says I:

"Coxswain, you must go, too," and I did." "You wish to go with me, then, Morris?" "I do, sir."

"What will your consort say?"

"Bless you, lieutenant, that was all patched up from old pieces of sail I found in the locker of my memory."

"You are not married, then?" asked Harold, struck with the seaman's devotion to him.

"Not that I remembers, Mr. Marmaduke; for you see, if I have taken to my old bulk any feminine timbers, knocking about around the world one forgets 'em, and a little cruising in foreign parts lets it leak out of your mind, and leaves a man as good as though he had not been hauled into the dock and refitted; but, with those female sharks it's different, for women can't hide devilment, as a man, and especially a sailor, can."

"Morris, I fear your morals and your respect for the ladies are both at a low ebb; but, joking aside, do you not know that, to follow my fortunes, you are a deserter?"

"No, sir; for you see my time of service is up in three days, and you wrote me leave for ten."

"Very well; return on board in three days, get your dismissal, and draw your pay."

"No, lieutenant, they might not dismiss me, you see, for the frigate wants more men, and then I'd have to stay."

"True; but you will lose your pay."

"Not much do I care; it is only a matter of half a year due me."

Harold thought a few moments in silence.

The deep regard felt for him by the humble coxswain touched him, and he felt that he would ever be a faithful friend, did he keep him with him, in whatever course he might follow, for upon his future footsteps he had not fully decided.

"Well, Morris, you can go with me. I have ample means for both of us until we decide what it is best to pursue. Go, now, and bring a vehicle to take us to a tavern."

Delighted at the decision of his officer, Morris gleefully departed upon his errand, and an hour after, Harold having decided to at once go on to New York, he and the coxswain were soon passengers on board a small packet-schooner plying between that city and Boston.

During the run to New York, Harold had an opportunity to think over his future course, and

at length came to the conclusion that he would return to the home of Enoch Ellis, taking Morris with him, and for the present resume his duties as a pilot; but as the packet glided up the harbor to her pier, the eye of the young man fell upon a schooner of wonderful beauty moored to the dock.

"Ain't she a beauty, sir?" ejaculated Morris, who was also looking with admiration upon the beautiful craft.

"She is indeed, coxswain; I never saw a handomer model, though one I saw on the Mexican coast was exceedingly like her."

"I remember her, sir! she was a three-masted schooner, what those black rascals down there called a *cara*—something."

"Caravel, you mean."

"Yes, sir, and she had an outlandish name that a fellow could not pronounce for getting foul of his tongue, unless he had his jaw broken."

"You are severe upon the language of Spain, coxswain! the craft you refer to is the same that lay next to us in the harbor of Vera Cruz; her name was the *El Cinto de Acero*."

"That's it, sir, for, if I don't speak the Engo I know it when it runs athwart my havscr! that means *steal and bolt*, as those Mexicans generally do, does it not, sir?"

"Not exactly, coxswain," answered Harold, laughing. "It means the Belt of Steel, more commonly called the Steel Belt."

"Mr. Marmaduke, why can't you command such a craft as that, in this coming war?"

Harold started, for the question came suddenly upon him, while Morris continued, as his quick eye detected that he had touched the right key:

"There's going to be a row with England, that's certain, and this Government will need privateers."

"Now the men in service may have used you hard, but the Government hasn't, and you might just as well as not get a swift craft and go privateering."

"You are right, Morris, and I will think of it; but come, we are at the pier now; get a vehicle and we will hunt up quarters."

Having secured comfortable quarters for himself and the coxswain, Harold threw himself into an easy-chair, and betook himself to deep meditation, refusing the dinner sent up to him by the kind tavern-keeper; but Morris had nothing to trouble his luck-and-go-easy nature, and after partaking of a hearty meal, sauntered forth for a look around the city.

One, two, three hours passed, and suddenly the coxswain burst into the room, his face all joyful, and found Harold still in thought.

"Now, Mr. Marmaduke, I've a word for you that will cheer your drooping spirits, for you see I have been beating around the docks, and in one of my tacks run across twins."

"What mean you, coxswain?" demanded Harold, for he observed the bright look of the seaman's face.

"Well, I'll not beat to windward with my tongue, but ease the news out at once. You know the queer schooner we saw this morning."

"Yes, the *caravel*."

"That's it, the carrywell, and she'll carry *you* and any amount of canvas you pile on those sticks of hers. Well, you see, I was nosing round, and run across an old shipmate, one who was on the Intrepid with us that night we burned the Philadelphia in the harbor of Tripoli."

"Who was he, for I should remember him?"

"And you do; his name is Jack Shirley and Co., that's the way the sign reads, for you see he's gone to ship-building."

"Yes, I recall him now, and a good fellow he was."

"Truth; he'd do anything, from straddling a shark to drinking the officers' liquor; he was a fine fellow, but, you see, he gave up the sea, because an old aunt of his was good enough to cruise to Davy Jones's locker, that is she shipped her cable of life, and left him her traps, which consisted of a ship-yard, for the old woman was the consort of a builder, and Jack is the man that put up the twin of the craft we saw this morning."

"There are two of those beautiful vessels then?"

"Fact, just alike, only one's different from the other, you see."

"No, I don't see, Morris, how they are *just alike*, if one is *different*."

"I'll tell you, sir; one of those twins, the one we didn't see, was built by Jack Shirley, kind of secret-like, so he told me."

"He says one day a fellow came in his office—a man with a devil-me-care look, and asked him if he could build an American schooner's hull, after a model he would give him, and

it with three masts like those West Indi crafts we see in Southern waters.

"Jack told him he was the very boy to build anything, from a coffin, for another old rich aunt he had an idea ought to sail to heaven, to a Chinese pirate.

"The stranger laughed just like a woman at this, says Jack, and then said:

"'I hat you do for me, Mr. Shirley, must be done well and with secrecy. I wish you to build a schooner for me after a model I will bring you this afternoon, and before you begin, you must engage all the hands you wish and discharge none of them until the job is finished, for I want no copy of my craft afloat.'

"Jack promised, and, at the appointed time the stranger came and brought with him a nigger, on whose face, Jack says, charcoal would make a white mark, that nigger was so black, but he was a jolly nigger, with smiling face and shiny eyes—"

"You saw him then, coxswain?"

"No, sir, Jack told me. Well, the darkey had a box, and it had in it the model of the prettiest craft Jack says he ever saw.

"'I made this myself, Mr. Shirley,' says the stranger, 'and I wish my vessel to be like it in every particular! Here is a check for ten thousand dollars, and when I come after the craft in six months I'll give you fifteen thousand more, if she suits me, and if she don't I'll blow her up and send your ship-yard with her; will you risk it?'

"'I'll do it, 'cause I like your style,' says Jack, and keelhaul me, if he didn't keep his word, for I went all over the craft this morning."

"Did he break his word to the stranger and build two schooners alike?" asked Harold, interested in Morris's story.

"Not he! but Jack came into his office one day, and hearing a noise in a little back room he seldom used, he went there, and what did he see?"

"I'm sure I do not know, coxswain?"

"He saw one of his former workmen, one he was on bad terms with, cutting an exact model of the little schooner which he had before him.

"It didn't take Jack Shirley long to kick that fellow out; but the scamp went to another builder, and from *memory* and measurements which he had, drew a model, and they commenced to put up a twin to Jack's craft, and that was it we saw this morning."

"It was an infamous act, but the builder has made a beautiful vessel."

"Yes; she's a beauty, that's a fact; and when you compare them they look as much alike as two beans, but then there's a difference, for Jack showed me all over his, which is just finished and lying locked up in his dock, and I went all over the other craft, which is for sale."

"For sale?"

"Yes, sir; well, the difference between the two no landsman would discover, and mayhap, few seamen, unless they were thorough fellows; but I saw it in many places, and though I would be content to sail always in the copy, I tell you I consider Jack's craft is as much superior as you are to me, Mr. Marmaduke."

"Thank you, Morris; you say the schooner is for sale?"

"Yes, sir; and she's a beauty and no mistake, and perfect from keelson to truck; they ask fifteen thousand dollars for it."

"Fifteen thousand dollars! Would to God I had that sum, or knew where to get it."

"That's why I told you about it, Mr. Marmaduke, for I thought perhaps we might lay some plan to get the craft."

"We'll try, coxswain; we'll try."

CHAPTER VI.

ON BOARD THE STEEL BELT.

THE more Harold Marmaduke pondered over what he had heard, the more he troubled himself to think where he could get so large a sum of money, with which to purchase the schooner, for the suggestion of Morris, "to go privateering," had determined him upon his future course of action.

All that night the young officer lay awake in troubled thought, and during the next day, which was bleak and stormy, paced his room in anxious humor.

Toward the afternoon the storm increased in fury and drove the coxswain "under lee of the tavern," as he expressed it, for he had been cruising around the streets all the morning.

"Well, coxswain, what luck?"

"Good, sir; for I was taken in tow by an old tar and went to a house where you *chance* your money, and I won as much as fifty dollars, so you see I'm half-right."

"Yes, yes; by heaven! I have it. Coxswain, do not throw your money away, for you may have need of it. I will return soon."

So saying, Harold threw on his storm-suit and went forth into the street, wending his way toward a well-known banking-house, where he had always deposited his pay as saved up.

A letter from the tavern-keeper introduced him, and he drew out over eight hundred dollars, which, with what he had in his purse, gave him one thousand.

"Yes, I'll risk it; I'll seek the gambling-hell where I know Lyle used to go, and other of the officers, and put all on a card.

"If I win, I'll buy the schooner, equip her, and go out as a privateer."

"If I lose, I will not care what becomes of me, for upon this I stake my hopes of Claudine, honor and all."

Retracing his way to his quarters, Harold found the coxswain awaiting him; but wishing to be alone with his own thoughts, he sent Morris to find the owner of the beautiful schooner, to inquire what was the lowest cash price she could be bought for.

Then, with a quick nervous tread, and troubled brow, like an April sky, clouding and brightening, as hope or despair flitted through his thoughts, he paced the room, often speaking half-aloud:

"Perhaps Enoch Ellis could *lend* me the money, for he never appeared to want, I remember; but then, could I find it in my heart to risk what he is saving up for Aline?"

"No, I will not do it; I will risk all on the turn of a card, though never before have I been guilty of an act unworthy a gentleman."

"Yes, I will risk all, for desperate positions compel desperate measures; and then, if successful, I will first seek my old home, learn from Enoch and his wife all they know of my birth, and endeavor to remove this stain from off my life, while, at the same time, with the vessel at my command, I can still serve the Government, for America will need aid in this coming struggle."

"Oh! if I could only clear up the mystery hanging over my life, how happy would I be!"

"What! it is eleven o'clock, and Morris not back? I hope no harm has come to him; but I must be off. Aid me all ye good angels even though it may be in a bad step, for I do evil that good may follow."

So saying, Harold Marmaduke wrapped his cloak around him and strode forth into the darkness and storm, which were in strange sympathy with his troubled thoughts.

Ere this the reader has doubtless recognized in Harold Marmaduke the young naval officer of the opening chapter of this story! he that entered the gilded saloon of crime to win a fortune by a freak of luck, and within the hour lose it as rapidly as he had gained it, because the fickle goddess turned her back upon her seeming favorite.

Had Harold been an expert at cards, he would have left the table as soon as he won so largely, and had he been less particular, would have refused to play again, for the bank had taken its chances against him; but, disliking the charge of meanness, he turned again to play, staking, for he was a novice in vice, his entire winnings upon a card, trusting to luck to stick to him, and staring fate in the face.

When he lost, he became reckless, and in the desire to win back his money placed upon the table a handsome watch and chain, presented to him by the under officers of his frigate, as an appreciation of their regard for him, for Harold had always been particularly kind to his men, and had not an enemy among them.

All went from him, and in despair, completely overwhelmed by the calamity which had befallen him, and driven wild, almost, by the thought of the double stain upon his character, he fled forth into the night, temporarily bewildered and reckless, bent on self-destruction as the only cure for his sufferings.

How his rash intentions was thwarted, by the timely intervention of a sudden conflict, to which he hastened, and where he did good service, the reader is already aware.

Now I will follow Harold, and his strange companion, on board the schooner and into her cabin, making known what transpired there.

Upon ascending to the deck, Harold discovered that every thing was in perfect order, and that the high bulwarks hid, crouching behind them, several heavy guns. The commander allowed him a little time to glance around, but conducted him at once to the cabin, which was roomy and furnished with sumptuous elegance in every part.

"Be seated, sir, and over a bottle of wine we'll become better acquainted. Ebony!"

"Sir," answered a voice from a state-room, and a negro servant, clad in a dark green uniform, entered the cabin, and his black face did not *ely* his name.

"Bring goblets and some of that old *Mexique* wine. Two bottles, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," and in a few moments the black returned with a salver of solid gold, holding two goblets of the same precious metal, besides the bottles of wine."

"Now, Ebony, prepare the larboard* state-room, for I have a guest, and then you can go to bed."

As soon as the black had departed, the commander of the schooner threw himself into an easy-chair, motioning Harold to do the same, and commenced opening one of the bottles of *Mexique*, while the lieutenant sat closely regarding him, as the light from a silver lamp fell full upon him.

He was a man of perhaps thirty, though a certain stern look in his face, and a few streaks of gray upon either temple, caused him to seem older.

His hair was rather golden than otherwise, his face clean-shaven, sun-browned and decided, while the eyes were a peculiar blue, or gray, for they appeared to be constantly changing color.

His form was of slight build, under the medium height, but of perfect symmetry, while his every movement commanded grace and power, suggesting in Harold's mind the strength and beauty of the leopard.

Dressed in a suit of dark blue, he appeared to ordinary observation only a seaman; but, altogether, there was something about him, visible upon a second glance, that stamped him as no ordinary man.

From bearsay Harold knew something of him—that he was not a Mexican, though in the service of that country, and had won a name as a remarkably successful commander, having cruised for years in the gulf, and elsewhere, in defiance of both Spanish and French vessels sent in pursuit of him.

Rumor also went so far as to couple with his name that of a corsair; but if this was true he had never been discovered in any act of piracy by American cruisers; and Harold remembered that for some time his own frigate had orders to keep an eye upon the Mexican privateer, but without having discovered any violation of law upon the high seas, on the part of the mysterious craft.

"Well, lieutenant, for I see you hold that rank, we will now drink a toast," and the Mexican commander filled the two goblets with wine.

"With pleasure, captain; but first let me make known to you my name. It is Harold Marmaduke."

"I have heard of you, sir; in fact, once saw you, for I recall your face now, at a *cafe* in Santa Cruz. I am called Bianca, and command this *goleta*, *El Cinto de Acero*."

"Captain Bianca, I have also heard of you; I am glad to meet you."

"A return of the compliment, senor; I may say doubly so, for my life was this night saved by you, and I thank you for it; your health and happiness;" and the captain dashed off his goblet of wine, while Harold followed suit with less haste.

"Pardon me, senor; but, since we first met, I have observed your deep brooding, over some heavy weight resting upon your heart; surely you are not troubled at the thought that your hand took the life of a human being a short while since?"

"I had almost forgotten the circumstance."

"Then why have the blues? Let me know what the matter is, and I will serve you if in my power, for surely I owe it to you," and Bianca leant forward with more interest than he had before shown, while Harold, after a moment's hesitation, replied:

"Captain, in your voice and manner there is a tone of sympathy, that chimes in strangely with my bitter feelings at present, and I will tell you."

"Been dismissed the service for some youthful indiscretion? Do not mind it, my man."

Harold's face flushed, and he replied, quickly:

"You are wrong, sir; I was not dismissed from the navy, but one week ago resigned my commission, and left my frigate in Boston. It was, perhaps, cowardly in me to take the step I

* In the time of which I write it was *larboard* and *starboard*; of late years it has been changed to *port* and *starboard*.—AUTHOR.

did, and mayhap I should have remained and braved the sneers of my brother officers."

"Surely your face belies you, if you did aught to deserve the contempt of men," rejoined Bianca, warmly.

"From my heart I thank you; I am guiltless of any crime."

"That I will swear to; you have resigned, you say? Good! You are free, then, and open for a berth, and I need an officer, a first luff, and give you his place—will you take it?"

Harold was so overcome, for a moment, that he could not speak, for he was raised from the depths of despair to the heights of hope in an instant.

At last he said, having swallowed another goblet of the generous wine poured out for him:

"Captain Bianca, you have done more than you can believe; *you have saved me from myself*."

"Deem me a coward if you will—a silly fool—but when I heard the sound of combat between you and those ruffians, I was upon the verge of suicide."

"Good God! do I hear aright?"

"You do, captain."

"Some great sorrow, some overwhelming calamity has driven you to this, Lieutenant Marmaduke. A brave man, such as the world knows you to be, would not contemplate self-murder unless his trials and sufferings were more than he could bear," and Bianca spoke warmly.

"I will tell you all, sir, for you inspire me with confidence, and you can judge for yourself."

Harold then told the Mexican commander the story of his life, as much as he knew of it—of his having been found adrift at sea in an open boat by Enoch Ellis, and reared by him until his fifteenth year.

Then he made known his shipwreck, his deep love for Claudine, and finally his resignation, its cause, and his gambling for money to purchase a privateer schooner.

Bianca listened attentively, not once interrupting him, and then said:

"Thank God we met, Mr. Marmaduke. It is in my power to serve you, I assure you."

"You say a schooner, of American hull and West Indian rig, one in fact resembling this craft of mine, tempted you to risk garning for purchase-money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you see that schooner?"

"At the pier, as I landed from the Boston packet."

"Strange, very strange. Describe the craft, Mr. Marmaduke, and believe me, I ask this from no idle curiosity, as I will presently show you, for I also have a life history to tell."

Harold told all he knew about the schooner, according to what the coxswain had said, and a dark frown came upon the face of Bianca, who, after a moment said:

"Marmaduke, it was I that ordered the schooner built, by Shirley, after a model I made myself, and which I was determined should unite both speed and sea-going qualities, far superior even to this noble vessel we are now on."

"The model is a good deal like this vessel, only larger and improved in many ways; the rigging will be exactly the same in style, as on this craft, for I like the lateen sails exceedingly."

"What can you desire with another vessel, captain?"

"I will tell you. The *El Cinto de Acero* is now getting old and leaky, from the numerous wounds she has received in action, and I came to New York to get my new vessel, for a purpose I have in view, and which you shall learn, while this schooner, after undergoing repairs, I intended to return to Mexico as a present to the Government; for the craft belongs to me, and I brought on with me a crew of Mexicans to run her back."

"Shirley told me nothing of this copy of my vessel, and it is news to me."

"I expect he was afraid to do so, and knowing it was no fault of his, he concluded to be silent about it," said Harold.

"Doubtless you are right. In the morning we will see this twin sister of my goleta, and if she is as good a vessel as you represent, she must not pass into other hands, for I am determined to fly the sea faster than any other craft afloat, at home or abroad."

CHAPTER VII.

BIANCA'S STORY.

AFTER a few minutes of silence, Bianca pour-

ed out another goblet of wine, and dashing it off, said, quietly:

"Confidence begets confidence, Marmaduke, and hence I will now make known to you who and what I am."

"You will notice that I speak English without an accent, although I am supposed to be a Mexican; but you may say the same of my Spanish and French, for I learn a language readily, and have had considerable experience in speaking other tongues, as fate has made me somewhat of an adventurer."

"By birth, I am an American, having been born in Maryland, in which State my father was a planter of wealth, and my mother, whom he married when in Paris at college, was a French countess."

"I was the only child of my parents, and until my fourteenth year was the idol of the household; then, a dear friend of my mother's died, and being in indigent circumstances, begged that my parents would care for her two children, a boy of seven and a girl of four.

"Their parents had once been wealthy, but in a speculative enterprise the father had lost his all and had taken his own life, leaving his wife and children almost destitute."

"The wife lived one year only after the death of her husband, and then died of a broken heart, while my parents ever kind and noble, cared for her lonely orphan children."

"They lived in Carolina, and my father carried me with him when he went to bring them on, and from my first meeting with my little brother and sister, as I called them, I loved them as though they had been really such, and did all in my power to make them happy."

"They were beautiful children, rather Spanish-looking, with dark hair and eyes, and as good as child-flesh can be, for you know children always have an under-current of devilment in their composition."

"My parents made no difference between myself and the little ones, who soon really believed that they were my brother and sister."

"Instead of sending me to school or college, my father procured for me a private tutor, and hence I lived always at home, greatly to the delight of all of us, and in quiet happiness the years passed, until one afternoon, when I was in my twentieth year, as I was returning home on horseback along the bay-shore road, for our plantation lay on the Chesapeake, I was startled by a loud cry coming from a thickly-wooded point of land, where there was a summer-house, or pavilion, used by the family in pleasant weather as a look-out."

"I drove the spurs into my horse and dashed forward, for I recognized the voice of my little sister, Clarice, then ten years of age, and suddenly came upon half a dozen rough-looking men engaged in kidnapping both Clarice and her brother, who was struggling hard to free himself and defend his sister."

"A shot from my pistol brought one of the villains down, and a blow from my heavy riding-whip felled another; but, ere I could do more, I was seized, dragged from my horse, and dealt a violent blow upon the head."

"It was hours before I was again conscious, and aching severely, it was some time ere I could recall what had happened; but soon my senses came back to me, and listening, I heard the splash of water, and the heavy tread of men overhead."

"I was at sea, on board of a vessel, I was certain; so, springing to my feet I rushed on deck, and beheld a queer kind of craft such as I never had seen before, but which I afterward knew to be peculiar to the waters of the Gulf."

"A dozen dark, foreign-looking men were attending to various duties, and far astern there was just the faint outline of land."

"At the wheel was one seaman, and near by him stood a man whose face I never shall forget; it was a dark, sinister but strikingly handsome face, of perhaps forty, and so strangely like my mother's that I started with surprise."

"To hasten on with my story, I will say that the man was the brother of my mother; that from boyhood he had been a wild, wayward fellow, had slain a servant in a fit of passion, and after running through with thousands that his parents had allowed him, he plotted against the Government, was discovered, and sentenced to banishment for life from France, while his estate was given over by the Government to my mother."

"This turned him with bitter hatred against his sister, and he determined to revenge himself upon her, and having won heavily at the gaming-table he chartered a vessel, collected around him a vile crew and carried out his revenge so

far as to kidnap my adopted sister and brother, believing them to be her own children."

"I knew before of his wicked life; but his own lips told me how he had determined upon revenge, and I cannot express his rage when I told him I alone was the one upon whom to vent his anger."

"He raved, he swore, and putting me in irons, kept me there until we arrived at an island of the West Indies, where one night I was put ashore and left alone, while the human fiend put away again in his craft, carrying with him poor Clarice and her brother, and devoting his after years to piracy."

"The place where I was landed would have been my grave, for desolate and barren indeed it was, had not a schooner touched there for water several days after I was left alone, and thus rescued me in an almost starved condition."

"The craft was a pirate, but the crew, barbarians though they were, pitied and cared for me, and months I remained with them ere I could make my escape."

"At last I succeeded in getting away, by springing overboard when in the harbor of Vera Cruz, and swimming ashore. Seeking the American Consul I made known my story; he kindly furnished me with funds, and I left for my home, arriving there after nearly a year's absence, to find great changes, for my poor, broken-hearted mother was dead, and my sorrowing father almost crushed beneath the blow that had so heavily fallen upon him."

"My father knew all that I could tell him, for a letter had come from that human fiend, stating all he had done to me, and also saying he intended rearing up Clarice and her brother to his liking, all for sweet revenge. The letter was mailed at Vera Cruz, Mexico, and from my reading it I determined upon my course—to track that man to the bitter end."

"Furnished with ample means, I left home, went to Mexico, and began my work of tracking; but need I tire you with an account of the lands and seas over which I wandered on that duty?"

"Need I say how I was wrecked twice, once a prisoner for a year to the Algerines, and again the captive of Mexican pirates, to find out that the man I searched for had become a corsair chief, and was cruising in the Gulf?"

"I will not dwell on this, but simply add, that I returned to my home in Maryland, to find my father dead, sleeping beside my poor mother, and I the heir to their wealth; but I cared not for that, and only took sufficient funds with me for my purpose, which was to build and equip a vessel and start in pursuit of that human monster."

"I purchased this craft in Baltimore, had her rigged and refitted in Havana, and from the Mexican Government received a commission, the better to enable me to carry out my design."

"I named my vessel the Steel Belt, and I will show you why."

Springing to his feet, Bianca quickly cast aside his coat and vest, and tearing open his shirt, displayed, encircling closely his waist, a narrow belt of shining steel.

"Do you see this? Touch it, for 'tis no sham—'tis real steel, and that monster in whose veins flows the same blood that flows in mine, placed it here, ere he put me on that lonely island, now ten years ago."

"Ay, he had this belt riveted on me as a mark to remember him by, and I have had a like mark put on my vessel, giving to her its name."

"Ten long years have I worn it, and often has it saved my life, strange to say, from sword-thrust and pistol-shot; and I will wear it until I die, unless I find that man."

"One word more, Marmaduke: though I have been a wanderer, and served beneath a foreign flag, I am an American; hence I came here to get my vessel, that I might cruise as a privateer against England, for already are the guns of war loaded, and I have resigned from the Mexican navy."

"Now you know all. It is late—let us retire; here is your room, and I wish you good-night."

Completely prostrated by the reaction that had come over him, and worn out with bodily and mental fatigue, Harold sunk to slumber in his sumptuous bed, and woke not until the sound of voices disturbed him.

"Strange! Where can I be? But certainly that is the coxswain's voice," he murmured, as he listened and heard;

"But he may be sick, I tell you, my dark-colored friend."

"No, he is only tired; the captain said he was not to be called," said another voice, that recalled to Harold the tones of Bianca's colored servant, Ebony.

"Coxswain?"

"Ay, ay, sir," and the next instant Morris put his head in at the cabin door.

"How, in the name of all that's glorious, did you come here?"

"In a boat, sir."

"How did you know I was here?"

"The captain—the man with the dangerous and melancholy blue eyes—came to the tavern at eight o'clock this morning, and sent me with your luggage aboard."

"Eight o'clock! What time is it now?"

"Eleven, sir."

"How sound asleep I've been. Yes, I remember I told him where I stopped; this was indeed kind of him. Coxswain, I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir, and I am glad to see you, for I thought you had been done away with in the vile town."

Harold gave the coxswain credit for hitting pretty near the truth, and rising, dressed himself quickly, and sat down to a good breakfast, that Ebony prepared for him.

Ere he had finished his meal Bianca entered, dressed in citizen's clothes, and greeting him warmly, handed him a small packet, which, on opening, displayed his own watch and chain, and a roll of bank-notes.

"My noble friend, how did you get them? Pray tell me," said Harold, in surprise.

"Very easily; I went to the owner of the saloon, told him to glance at a badge I wore, which was similar to those worn by the chief detectives of the Government, and after telling him I knew all about your having won a fortune from his 'bank,' and then, under a false sense of justice to him, had been induced to play again, I demanded the return of your watch, chain and one thousand dollars, or let him take the consequences. He was frightened severely, and restored them without a word."

"How can I ever repay you?" said Harold, touched by this mark of friendship in the captain.

"I will tell you: it is important for me to at once exchange vessels, and in an hour I will tow to Shirley's shipyard, and make the exchange to my own schooner, while you can run down to your old home and visit your friends for a few days, when I will call for you. You and your man can take the new vessel's largest cutter, which is all rigged for sailing, and in a few hours you can get there."

"I will at once make the transfer, and join you the third night from this evening. I say *night*, because I intend running out under cover of the darkness, and I will tell you why:

"I went to see my schooner's twin this morning, and find her, though *apparently* a perfect copy, in reality very different, for she will not possess either the speed or the weatherly qualities of my own craft, although both fast, stiff, and a beautiful imitation; but she is no longer for sale, having been purchased for the United States Government, I hear, and placed under the command of your old enemy, Lennox Montclair."

"What?"

"True, and Walter Lyle is her first luff, the Portsmouth having gone on the stocks for repairs, and other vessels receiving her officers, as already the tocsin of war has sounded."

"Do I hear aright?"

"Yes, the storm has broken, and all is activity with army and navy, so you see I am desirous of getting to sea at once, and I will lie in wait for the twin schooner, and give them a surprise they little suspect."

"Surely, you would not attack—"

"No, no, you misunderstand me; I am as true an American as yourself, Marmaduke."

"I beg your pardon, Captain Bianca; but—"

"I understand you; my own remarks led you to make the mistake; but wait and see."

An hour more, and Harold and Morris were darting through the Narrows before a stiff breeze, the schooner's cutter behaving well and sailing like a bird, as she headed down toward Sandy Hook, under the skillful guidance of the young officer, whose hand had not forgotten its cunning in his years of absence from the duty of a pilot.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HIGHLAND CABIN HOME.

NINE years bring great changes, even in nature, and particularly in human beings.

Thus had the coming and going of nine long

summers changed Aline Ellis, the pilot's daughter, far more than one could imagine.

The reader had a glance at Aline, when Harold was at home after more than four years' absence, and beheld her then just budding forth into maidenhood.

Now, when seventeen summers have lightly touched her, each adding but renewed beauty to face and form, it was startling almost to see the change, for a most perfect woman was the result.

As darkly beautiful as a Spaniard, with pink-bronzed complexion, heavy masses of raven hair, and eyes velvety in their deep depths of darkness, where slept worlds of passion and fire, only needing the spark of love to burst into flame, a flame that would consume the heart with intense burnings, and with a form of voluptuous grace, Aline Ellis was indeed a creature of wondrous loveliness, a gem that any man would be proud to win and wear.

Upon the pilot's cabin home change had also come, for, loving Harold as though he were their own offspring, and Aline regarding him as dearly as she would have loved an own brother, daily all had struggled to improve the home-stead, making it more roomy, comfortable and beautiful against the wanderer's return.

The cabin of logs had been enlarged, improved, and refurnished with many conveniences, for Enoch lacked not the means to live, not depending wholly upon his calling for support.

A lawn of an acre sloping toward the river, had been well laid out, and flower-gardens grew on the south side of the cabin, while surrounding the inclosure was a neat fence.

Back against the hillside, and thus protected from the chill north winds, was the barn-yard, where two good horses were to be seen, several cows, and a number of sheep and swine, while rolling away toward the valley was visible half a hundred acres under fine cultivation.

The steep pathway leading from the cabin to the river-bank, had greatly been improved, graded off, and steps placed in its steepest places, while jutting out into the water was a neat but substantial pier, to which were tied a small cat-rig sail-boat, and several row-boats, from the surf-skiff to the pilot-yawl.

Anchored out in the stream was not the old pilot-sloop, that had served Harold so good a turn when he had boarded the Portsmouth in the storm, but a trim-looking schooner of twenty tons, with three men and a boy, her crew, lolling in the sun upon her decks.

Altogether it was a lovely scene, and one indicative of comfort and contentment, for Enoch Ellis, grown more gray and stern as the years passed on, sat on the broad porch in an easy-chair, smoking and gazing seaward, while his wife, whom time had rendered more sad looking, but otherwise touched lightly, was near, engaged in knitting socks for her husband.

Aline lay at full length upon the grass, in a negligent but graceful manner, and divided her time between a book and seaward gazing.

This scene, quiet and home-like, was eagerly gazed upon by one of the occupants of a small cutter that had rounded Gravelly Point, and was heading toward the little pier.

With a glass at his eye Harold, for it was the young officer, contemplated, with trembling heart, the home-like scene, and at the same time mechanically steered the boat through the circuitous channel up the river.

A few moments more and the cutter was under the schooner's stern and Harold hailed:

"Ahoy! what schooner's that?"

"The pilot-boat Marmaduke; Captain Enoch Ellis," answered one of the men on board, springing to his feet and saluting, for Harold was still in full uniform.

"Is Captain Ellis at home?"

"Ay, ay, sir: land at yonder pier," and the cutter passed on, hidden by the hill from the inmates of the cabin.

Springing ashore, and leaving Morris to secure the boat, Harold sped rapidly up the hill, and suddenly came face to face with the scene, so changed from what it was when he last beheld it, years before.

Standing in the shadow of the woods he contemplated for some time the cabin, its improvements, and the occupants, and then cried, in the ringing voice of the quarter-deck hail:

"Enoch Ellis, ahoy!"

"Ahoy! ay, ay, sir!" cried Enoch, starting to his feet, and for the moment thrown off his equilibrium by the ringing voice, which reminded him of the days when he went to sea before the mast in an English vessel of war.

"Harold! oh Harold!" cried Aline, recognizing him at a glance, and dashing forward she threw herself into his outstretched arms, while

Enoch and his wife also hurried forward to greet the wanderer home.

It was a joyous meeting, though in Harold's manner there was a certain tinge of sadness; but in pleasant converse, in which the coxswain joined, for his commander had made him come to the cabin as a guest, the evening passed away and bedtime came.

"Father Ellis, can I see you a moment ere we retire?" asked the young officer, who still called Enoch by the name he had in boyhood.

"Certainly, my son; let us walk forth upon the porch, and have a glance seaward, for it is a lovely moonlight night," and Enoch led the way forth into the open air.

"Father Ellis, I have resigned from the navy," abruptly said Harold.

"Resigned! and war commencing! I do not understand, my son," said the surprised pilot.

"I will explain; I told you to-night of my shipwreck, and my leaving my hospitable entertainers to go aboard the sloop-of-war Ambuscade; but I did not tell you the cause.

"The first luff of the sloop was Lennox Montclair."

"Indeed! he has risen rapidly, for a man of as little sea knowledge as he evidently possesses; but influence has raised him."

"I am not discussing that point but another; Montclair informed Lord Vivian that he had known me in boyhood, and that I had resting upon me the curse of being a nameless boy."

Enoch Ellis started as though he had been struck a violent blow; his face paled, his brow grew dark and stern; but after a moment he recovered himself, and said hoarsely:

"He told this lie; then would I take his life!"

"Yes, he told this, and more, he said you were aware of it."

"He lies, in his false throat he lies!"

"Thank God!"

"Yes, what I say is true, Harold; you were picked up at sea in an open boat by myself; one other was with you—a man who appeared to be your guardian, for he denied being your father, and did not live until we reached the land; you know where he lies, yonder beneath the shadow of Rocky Point."

"All he had with him was a bag of gold, and an old memorandum-book, both of which I still have; the memorandum-book stated that he, Arthur Denison, and his young charge, Harold Marmaduke, had sailed for America in the good ship Vixen, bound from Liverpool to New York, and been wrecked at sea, with all on board excepting one boat's crew, and those afterward died of starvation."

"His address was at a small village, some forty miles from London, and I felt always assured that by going there you could find your parents, or at least learn who they were; but my cowardice at losing you caused me to keep from you the secret."

"Now you know all that I know."

"Indeed I thank you, my more than father. Why I should have been shipped from England to America, in boyhood, I know not; but I believe I am honorably born, and that time will bring all things right."

"Anyhow I am an American in heart now, and will lend her my aid in this coming war."

"But you have left the navy, and just at a time when you were winning fame and rank."

"True, I left, because Montclair sowed the seeds of hatred toward me among my brother officers, and I was 'cut' by them."

"I left to return here, and from you find out the story of my life, and then to seek for proof of who and what I am in England, but my plans are somewhat changed for the present, and if I do not tire you, I will tell you all, even to my greatest follies."

"I am not tired, my son; I will listen," said Enoch, quietly, and Harold hastily made known to the pilot all with which the reader is already acquainted, hiding nothing.

"When will this schooner be here?" asked Enoch, after he had heard all.

"The third night from this, and I wish to conceal her here until Montclair's craft goes to sea, when we will up anchor and follow in her wake. How is the depth of water now in the channel?"

"A little shallow, I fear; but by midnight, in a day or two, it will be high tide, and she can run in and round Rocky Point and lie hidden until the next high water."

"Good! then that will be our plan; now let us retire," and the two men re-entered the cabin and departed to their separate sleeping-rooms, Harold with a much lighter heart than before, and Enoch, from some cause known to himself, in a mood strangely gloomy and sad.

Shortly after dark, upon the third night of Harold's stay at home, the pilot-boat stood out

from the dark shadows of the Highlands, and headed up toward the Narrows.

About half the distance across the bay had been run, when the moon arose, and its bright light fell upon the snowy white canvas of an approaching vessel, which under a cloud of sail was flying toward the little schooner.

"That is the *goleta*; I recognize her lateen rig," said Harold, who, with Enoch, the coxswain and Aline stood upon the pilot-schooner's deck."

"Yes, it must be; how she flies through the water," answered Enoch.

"Indeed, she does; her speed is remarkable; bring her up closer, my man, and I will hail her," answered Harold, and as the schooner approached, he called out in his clear, manly voice:

"*El Cinto de Acero*, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the schooner! Is that you, Marmaduke?" came in the ringing tones of Bianca.

"Ay, ay, sir! If you will come up into the wind we will board you."

"All right!" cried Bianca, and giving an order to his men, the beautiful vessel swept swiftly up into the wind, while at the same time, with seaman-like skill and speed, a cutter was lowered from her and put off for the pilot-boat, which had not yet come to.

"Now, Aline, watch that little heart of yours, for you are going to meet a dangerously fascinating man," said Harold, playfully, as the party waited for the approaching boat.

"I have no fear, Harold; but, how beautiful the vessel looks lying there upon the water," answered Aline, and the next moment the boat came alongside and all sprung in.

"Stand back for your anchorage, Dave, and see if you can not make the Marmaduke crowd yonder schooner, for you know nothing in these waters has ever led our little craft," said Enoch to his helmsman, and, as the boat shoved off, the eager crew of the graceful little harbor guide, sprung nimbly to work crowding their vessel with all the sail she would carry.

"Marmaduke, you are indeed welcome on board the Steel Belt!" and Bianca eagerly grasped his lieutenant's hand.

"Thank you, captain. This is my sister, Aline, whom it gives me pleasure to present to you, and this gentleman, my adopted father, Captain Enoch Ellis. The coxswain you have met before," said Harold, as the party reached the deck.

"Miss Ellis, it gives me great pleasure to be thus honored. Captain Ellis, I greet you, both for your own and for Marmaduke's sake. Coxswain, go forward, please, and ask my second luff, Señor Muriel, to rank you as boatswain of the Steel Belt."

Gracefully unaffected, and with a tender kindness in his manner, Bianca greeted his guests, and led them aft to the slightly-raised quarter-deck, where luxurious seats were placed for them, while Mat Morris, in delight at his unexpected promotion, walked forward with a prouder step than he had ever before assumed.

"With your permission, captain, I will take the wheel, as Harold tells me you wish a hiding-place in our waters for a day or two."

"Certainly; the craft is in your hands, and it will be a favor if you can carry her into a snug harbor, though it will not be for long," answered Bianca, and turning to Harold he said, with excusable elation and pitch in his tones:

"Well, Marmaduke, what do you think of my vessel?"

Harold glanced admiringly, and with a seaman's eye over her perfect and elegant proportions, from hull to the point of her penciled topmasts.

She was a three-masted schooner, or what is known in the Southern waters as a *caravel*, or *goleta*, and registered about three hundred tons.

Moving over the waters as though merely skimming them in her flight, she appeared almost like some huge bird from the upper air, searching the sea for prey.

She was very long, narrow, and of great depth, and crouched low upon the water, as if preparing to spring like a hound upon her game. The hull was painted black, only relieved from stem to stern by a narrow band of *shining steel*, like a belt, encircling her, and of pure metal, bright and glistening in the moonlight like the flash of a keen sword; her hull, lying low in the water, was surrounded by high bulwarks, the height of a man's head, which inclined slightly in-board, but not sufficiently to conceal three bright guns to a side, while three more, mounted upon pivots, upon the forecastle, astern and amidships, were of much larger caliber, and evi-

dently intended for long range, either in pursuit or flight.

The deck was painted white and bore no stain, while the quarter-deck was slightly raised above the ordinary level, giving a view of the head and shoulders of the man at the wheel, to a passing vessel.

The symmetry of the vessel was faultless, and her deep hull indicated great weatherly qualities, and a capacity of carrying immense pressure of canvas, even in roughest weather, while it also proved she could be driven with wonderful speed through the water by the amount of duck it would uphold.

The three masts were slender, single sticks, sloping off at the top to an almost pencil-like point, and the three rearing to a height of over ninety feet, for they were all very nearly the same in length, and raked boldly aft, while the standing rigging was extremely slight, the sails being hoisted aloft from the deck, by means of treble halyards rove through trucks at the mast-heads, where were also halyards for sending up flying topsails.

The masts were half encircled, near the deck, with racks containing long, glittering boarding-pikes; and fore, main, and mizzen-mast were all stained a rich brown color, and polished like marble, as were the slender, but extremely long yards (almost rivaling the masts in length), that crossed them, supporting the huge triangular sails that spread an immense field of canvas to the breeze; also, the *goleta* carried a large jib, flying-jib, and fore-mast staysail, which, with her three lateen sails, were set, and drove her through the waters with startling velocity, causing her to leave the swift-sailing pilot-boat far astern in spite of her spread of canvas.

Upon either bulwark, lashed between the guns, in brackets, were a dozen long sweeps, which could be used in a calm, by working them through small ports, to which were fastened inside covers, to hide the holes when the oars were not at work; upon the quarter and stern davits hung three boats, of the same elegant model as the schooner, while another, the gig that had brought Harold and his party aboard, was lying bottom upward amidship, and all having the belt of steel encircling them.

The binnacle, capstan, bars, wheels, and all other wood-work were of black walnut, highly stained, while all the moldings from stem to stern, were apparently of solid silver, and sparkled brightly in the moonlight; upon a small stationary stand of carved wood, just forward of the wheel, lay a gold speaking-trumpet, studded with precious stones, and glittering brilliantly at every motion of the vessel.

Forward, and in the waist were groups of seamen, a hundred in number, dressed in dark-green pants, white shirts, the collar of green silk, overlapping the shoulder, and wearing upon their heads green skull-caps, with gold bullion tassel, while around their waists were belts of finely woven steel.

For a long, long time, Harold gazed bewildered, upon the beautiful boat, her strange equipment, and stranger crew, who appeared to be dark-skinned Mexicans, and under a discipline as thorough as that of an English man-of-war.

Then he turned toward her strange commander, who, supporting Aline upon his arm, had been showing her about the decks.

Bianca was attired in a uniform of dark-green broadcloth, trimmed around the cuffs, upon the collar, and adown the outer seams of the pants with bright gold lace, while upon the shoulders were solid gold epaulettes, fashioned in the shape of a sea-shell.

Upon his breast sparkled several "orders," and around his waist, and half-concealed by a green silk sash, was a belt of steel, something like those worn by his crew, but of finer workmanship. Upon his head he wore a gold wire cap, half-naval, half-jockey, and serving both as a helmet to ward off a blow from a cutlass, and for ornament, for it was certainly a magnificent covering for his gold-brown locks.

A short sword hung suspended from his steel belt, which also held two handsome pistols, and this, with gauntlet-gloved hands, completed the outfit of Captain Bianca.

The young officer, second luff, whom Bianca had addressed as Muriel, and another promenading with him whom Harold knew to be third lieutenant, were attired in like manner as their commander, only they wore silver and not gold trimmings.

"You ask me what I think of your vessel, Captain Bianca? I have no words to tell you, for I am speechless with surprised admiration," admitted Harold, after a critical examination.

"I am glad you are pleased with your future

home. Mr. Muriel, set her sky-scrappers, and then come aft with Orlando, for I wish you to meet my friends."

In obedience to the order was heard the boatswain's call, for Mat Morris was rigged out in the uniform and whistle of his new office, and immediately there arose from the deck, soaring aloft like huge white birds, the three light flying topsails, which at once settled into their places, and added renewed velocity to the speed of the schooner.

"She sails like a witch. See how she has left your little craft, Captain Ellis," cried Bianca, delightedly.

"Yes, I know nothing that can be driven through the water with this speed in such a breeze. Why, she makes ten out of a six-knot puff," answered Enoch, and as at this moment the two lieutenants approached, Bianca turned and presented them to his guests, adding, after the introduction:

"You see I have only Mexicans with me; you, Marmaduke and myself, excepting my servant Ebony, and your man Morris, will be the only foreigners, but though I say it, that perhaps should not, no better crew mans any craft afloat."

"I believe you, Captain Bianca. Shall I assume my duties now and shorten sail, for we are running in rapidly toward shallow water?" answered Harold.

"Do so, please, and allow me to say that my ship-tailor has already finished your uniform, which, with other appurtenances, you will find in your state-room."

Harold bowed his thanks, and then, with an accent of Spanish as pure as a native, gave his orders to shorten sail in tones that told the crew their acquisition of first luff fully knew his duties and was every inch a man and sailor.

Rapidly the topsails descended to the deck; down came the huge lateen mainsail and flying jib, and steadily the vessel swept on, under the skillful guidance of Enoch Ellis, past the frowning heights of the Highlands, around Rocky Point, into the quiet waters of the north Shrewsbury river, where her anchor was lowered and she became stationary, while Harold, Bianca, Enoch and Aline entered the gig and were rowed to the little pier, the commander being persuaded to take up his quarters ashore, while his vessel remained there, and little persuasion it needed, for already had his manly heart begun to throb at every work and look of the pilot's daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE.

UPON the afternoon following the night upon which the *El Cinto de Acero* stood down the bay, and sought a hiding-place beneath the Highlands, a craft, strangely like the Mexican, sped through the Narrows, and headed toward Sandy Hook.

It was the copy of the Steel Belt, and to even a close observer could not be told from the original; but there was a difference when it came to a thorough examination of her parts.

Upon the decks, however, appeared a widely different crew, for the uniform of the United States was visible upon over a hundred seamen, and some thirty upright marines, while upon the quarter-deck stood her officers, two of whom the reader has met before, for they are Lennox Montclair and Walter Lyle, who had been detached from the sloop-of-war and frigate and ordered to the command of the *goleta*, which Judge Montclair had purchased and presented to the Government, upon condition his son should be placed in command.

Walter Lyle was given the position of first luff.

Delighted with the movement and speed of their vessel, the two officers were conversing gayly together as she sped through the Narrows, when suddenly the second lieutenant, who had charge of the deck, came forward and said:

"Captain Montclair, will you run directly for the point of the Hook, or will you go through the inner channel?"

"Keep her away, Mr. Latrobe, as much as possible. Hold! do you see yonder white villa rising above that sea of green foliage—there, just one point off the lee bow?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is my home; head for that, for I would land there ere sunset and take a parting glass of the old governor's good sherry."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You live here on this bay, then, captain?" queried Lyle, as the second officer walked away.

"Yes; yonder home is my birthplace, and the old gentleman owns some thousand acres there, which he holds in keeping for his son and heir,

until he slips his cable for a better world," unfeeling laughed Lennox Montclair.

"Lyle, have you heard aught of Marmaduke since his resignation?" suddenly asked Lennox.

"Not word; the commodore returned to the Portsmouth and the devil was to pay generally, when he heard how we had acted. He damned us all for a set of idiots who preached up republicanism, and thought more of a *name* than European princes did."

"I tell you he was red-hot, and coolly told us all, luffs and middies, that Marmaduke knew more in a minute than the whole of our pack would ever know in the whole course of our lives on earth, and our sojourn in a warm climate hereafter, to which place he calmly invited us to proceed with all due dispatch."

"Why old Moreton must have had a high regard for that low-born youth."

"Indeed he did, and I tell you I was glad to be excused from remaining under his eye, after what had happened, for the old hulk had a way of looking clear through you; but you should have seen Marmaduke's departure from the frigate."

"It was elegant, I heard."

"That it was, prime! He made us all feel as though we were guilty of some crime, and until he got into the gig alongside, I did not know whether he would give me a private parting salute with his foot or not, and having once seen him seize an Algerine in his arms and hurl him bodily over a precipice into the sea, I well knew his strength."

"Yes, I heard of that; the frigate's crew had landed, I believe, to communicate with General Eaton, near Tripoli!"

"Yes; Commodore Moreton, Marmaduke, myself and some forty men were of the party. We had penetrated inland a short distance, and had come to a high hill of rock, where, upon sounding, we were attacked by a band of Algerines, one of whom would have slain the commodore, had not Marmaduke prevented it by sending the fellow on a flight through mid-air. I shall never forget the look and gymnastics of that pirate as he descended *en route* for the ocean, hundreds of feet beneath. Ugh! I took the same trip with him, for weeks and weeks after in my dreams, while upon Marmaduke it had no effect, or if it did, he did not show it. By Jove, how this craft flies."

"Indeed she does, and I was lucky to get her."

"How did it happen, sir?"

"Why you see she was built in a most secret manner by a wealthy Spaniard living in Havana, who cut the model himself, and did not wish any one else to get hold of it, as he was determined to out-sail everything afloat."

"But as he wrote to his builder he could not come on for three months after her, he determined to play sharp on the Don, sell this craft, and build him another at once; so he ran her out into the river where the old governor, my father, ran afoul of her, and at once paid him his fifteen thousand dollars, giving her to Government on condition I should command her."

"Lucky indeed for you; then she is the only craft of her build afloat?"

"Ay, ay, and wouldn't the Don swear if he saw her; but Lyle, do you know aught of our second luff?" asked Captain Montclair, in an undertone, nodding toward Lieutenant Latrobe, a man of perhaps fifty, with a commanding figure, quick, nervous manner, and a face exceedingly dark, and well preserved for one of his years; his hair was gray, as was also his long mustache, and his eyes keen, black, and with a bitter cruel look in them—a look that was but increased by the hardened expression of the stern mouth.

"No, I never met him before yesterday; he certainly has a striking face; his name is French."

"Yes, Talbot Latrobe he hails to, and I believe he was in the French navy; at any rate, he is a thorough seaman, and comes well recommended."

"My father told me he was a count in France, who, losing his fortune and title, for some political scheme against his sovereign, came to this country to offer his services in our war with England."

"Then he is all right, but he looks like a thorough devil."

"Mr. Latrobe, run in about half a dozen cables' length, and then come to anchor; I will go ashore in the gig, and you please retain command for Mr. Lyle will accompany me," said Captain Montclair.

"Will you return to-night, monsieur?" asked the lieutenant, with an accent thoroughly French, though he spoke English well.

"Yes, sir; I will be back by eleven and will then at once get under way," and the gig rowed landward toward the wooded point half a mile distant, leaving the Surf Queen, as the young officer had named his vessel, lying like a swan upon the waters.

The gig grounded upon the sandy shore, near a small grove, through which a pathway led to the hill above, and telling the men that he would send a servant down with refreshments for them, Lennox sprung ashore, followed by Walter Lyle, and the two started up the steep hillside toward the Montclair mansion, a mile distant, and beautifully situated upon a commanding eminence.

Hastily walking along, the two officers failed to notice the forms of two men, clad in citizens' attire, but armed with swords, who were standing in their pathway, until they came full upon them.

"A word with you, Captain Montclair!"

The voice was stern and threatening, as Harold Marmaduke stepped forward and confronted the surprised officers.

"Ha! Marmaduke, as I live. What would you, sir?"

"I would hurl in your teeth the epithet of *liar*; you are a base villain, Lennox Montclair," came the hissing words.

"This to me, sir? you forget—"

"I forget nothing; you poisoned the ears of my friends against me with your lies, which were believed by many, and I am sorry to say by Walter Lyle, for I always considered him too true a man to be swayed by the false tongue of a villain."

"You shall answer for this, Marmaduke! before God you shall," said the officer, pale as death.

"Before God I expect to one day answer for the sins done in the body; but *before me* you shall now answer; draw and defend yourself, if your hand has nerve enough to defend your craven heart; or, if you prefer pistols, my friend here and Lyle can arrange for us;" and Harold spoke calmly.

Lennox Montclair hesitated, his mind filled with conflicting emotions: well did he know the great prowess of his adversary with the sword, for he had heard often of his skill, and with a pistol he felt 'twere certain death to face him, for he was a dead shot; his heart sunk at the wrong he had done a man that never had injured him, and he felt that indeed he was a criminal; but then came the vision of Claudine Vivian before him, and his brow darkened, for he had learned to love the beautiful maiden as dearly as it was in his vile nature to love, and intended to move heaven and earth to make her his wife, though he knew that she loved Harold, and believed not the stories he had told of him.

Determined to use every effort to put his rival from the field, and feeling considerable confidence in his own swordsmanship, for really he possessed great skill, and was a powerful man, he decided to fight, and so said sneeringly:

"I will meet you, and with swords, for did I say pistols it would bring my friend and lieutenant here into difficulty, and though I hesitate not to punish the impertinence of a low-born disowned, I would not mix Lyle up with the affair, by having him arrange terms with your friend, who is doubtless like yourself, a man without a name."

The words were said slowly, and with distinct utterance, that they might sink as deep as possible into the heart he intended to wound more deeply with his sword, if possible; but hardly had the sound of his voice died on his lips, when he was seized in a grasp he was powerless to resist, and hurled with terrible force to the earth, where he lay stunned and bleeding, while the deep tones of Bianca said:

"Come, Marmaduke, I have punished him sufficiently for the present; another time he may cross our paths," and then turning toward Walter Lyle, who had been a startled spectator of the scene, he continued:

"To you, sir, I will say that, though you are found in bad company, I will not desert a fellow seaman in distress; but will send you help from your boat."

Marmaduke was as much startled by the act, and wonderful strength of Bianca, as was Lyle, for he had handled Montclair as though he had been a child in his arms; but seeing that the stunned captain did not show signs of returning consciousness, and that further chastisement was then out of the question, he walked away with his commander, bestowing no other look upon his foe, or former shipmate.

True to his word, Bianca hastened down to the shore, and informed the coxswain of the gig to go up the hill with his men, carrying their

oars to make a litter for their commander, who was severely hurt.

Hurrying up, in a few moments they came to the spot, where lay the elegant form of Lennox Montclair, the head supported in the lap of his lieutenant.

The handsome face was as pale as death, the passionate eyes closed, and a blood-stain around the mouth, where he had bitten his lip.

"Come, boys, the captain has met with an accident; but it is not serious, I hope. Here, raise him gently on your oars, and carry him on board the vessel—gently, gently, my lads!

"There, now, coxswain; get aboard at once, and I will hasten on to the mansion, and let Judge Montclair known about it," and Walter Lyle was hastening away, when a faint call came from the wounded man.

"Well, captain, I am glad to see you are better. What can I do?" said the lieutenant, kindly.

Drawing his head near him, Montclair whispered in his ear:

"Say I am not seriously hurt—that I had a severe fall, and, Lyle, have the governor send some cases of that good old sherry aboard, for we must put to sea to-night, as I will soon be better."

The lieutenant promised, and hastened away upon his mission, and returning two hours after on board, accompanied by Judge Montclair, a pompous, portly, port-loving old gentleman of fifty, found his commander reclining upon a luxurious lounge, and entirely willing and able to enjoy a glass of the coveted sherry, which the young officer, as much on his own account as on that of his captain, had not forgotten to bring aboard.

CHAPTER X.

THE TWIN CRUISERS.

THOUGH Lennox Montclair had been severely stunned by the violent fall Bianca had given him, he was not seriously injured, for, excepting a slight dizziness, and pain in the side, he was, in a few hours, comparatively well.

Toward midnight his father took his departure, still ignorant of the real cause of his son's injury, and the moon having risen, the cruiser got under way, and before a stiff breeze sped across the waters, carrying her three lateen sails, jib and flying jib, and with every officer and man on deck, enjoying the evening, and admiring the rapid flight of their vessel.

Hardly had she rounded the low point of Sandy Hook and squared her lofty triangular sails to the eight-knot land-breeze that was blowing from the south-west, when a cry from Lieutenant Latrobe caused all to turn and look in the direction in which he was pointing, off their stern quarter.

Every eye fell upon a sight that caused a feeling of dread to strike the hearts of the boldest, for not a mile distant, and just pointing her sharp nose around the low "Hook," was *their vessel's twin*, an exact counterpart of the Surf Queen, from keelson to truck, from stem to stern.

Glasses were called for, and every officer leveled his at the strange, to them, apparition, and noted the remarkable resemblance, for the strange craft had her huge lateen sails spread, with jib and flying jib, as had the Surf Queen.

"My God! what can she be?" said Lennox Montclair, his fall having almost unmanned him.

"God only knows; it is the very shadow of this vessel," answered Walter Lyle.

"There is no other vessel afloat like this, that is made by mortal hands!" said, inquiringly, Lawton Spencer, the third luff, and a man who had risen to the quarter-deck from before the mast.

"No; this vessel was built after a peculiar model, and I cannot account in any way for yonder counterpart," said the young captain.

"She is overhauling us, sir," said Talbot Latrobe, who had been regarding her closely.

"Strange! she has the same sail set; ah! I have it, she is getting a stronger puff of wind."

"She still gains rapidly, captain," said Latrobe, after a long pause.

"Then set the foremast-staysail and rig the bonnet on the jib, Mr. Lyle."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The order was obeyed, and simultaneous with its execution the same sails were added to the purser, to the great surprise of all on board the Surf Queen, who saw how quickly their movements were followed by their strange companion.

"I dare not send a shot over her, for she is coming out of New York harbor, and hence

must be a friend—if she be a real craft," added Lennox Montclair to himself.

"The wind is increasing, captain, and we are now making ten knots; yet the stranger is overhauling us," remarked Walter Lyle, earnestly.

"I dislike to set topsails in this breeze; but run them up, and we'll walk away from our shadow—ha!"

Hardly had the words left the commander's lips, and the men, who stood ready at their posts, expecting the order to increase sail, obeyed, when, like three great balls of snow, the topsails of the strange craft rose aloft and spread their canvas wings to the breeze, at the same moment as those of the Surf Queen, and a cry from the crew echoed the exclamation of her commander.

"By the Lord Harry! yonder craft is not sailed by mortal hands!" cried Walter Lyle, and all now gazed upon her, as she boldly came on, her sharp booms cutting the water like a knife, and causing no wall of foam around them, as is usual with vessels of a less keen prow than was the goleta.

Steadily, swiftly she rushed forward, standing up as trim as a stele against the pressure of the ten-knot breeze, which keeled the Surf Queen well over, nearly to her lee-scuppers, with the mass of canvas she carried, and each moment causing renewed credence to the idea of her supernatural powers.

From Lennox Montclair down to the powder-monkey on board the Surf Queen, all were compelled to admit that their own craft was the fleetest vessel whose deck they had ever trod, and was making better speed out of the breeze than blowing than they believed it possible for craft to make; yet, there, astern of them, sailed an exact counterpart of their own ship, and since their first discovery of her, half an hour before, she had overhauled them rapidly, sailing a cable's length and a half to their one.

Soon the strange vessel was within a few ships' length of the Surf Queen, slightly falling off, as if disdaining to take the advantage and pass her to windward. Every eye searched her hull and rigging, and the glasses of the officers were kept constantly upon her, but only to more fully realize that she was the *twin cruiser* of *their own craft*.

"Does she carry guns, that you can discover, Mr. Lyle?" asked Lennox, in a voice the crew all heard.

"Her high bulwarks prevent my seeing, sir. Shall I go aloft and have a look?"

"No; beat to quarters; have the ports opened and guns run out, and we'll see if he follows suit."

"Ay, ay, sir! but the wash of the sea will flood our decks."

"Let it do so; this vessel will sail if her decks are under water, and the crew will only get a ducking which will do them no harm."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and immediately the beat to quarters sounded, the crew sprung to their places, the port sides were drawn back, and the threatening muzzles of the guns run out, while heavy seas broke through the wide openings.

But hark! the sound of "to quarters" is echoed from the strange craft, the ports (arranged with slides running along the bulwarks, the same as on board the Surf Queen) are opened and a like number of guns protrude their dark mouths.

"By Heaven! he is our very shadow! Do you see any one on board, Mr. Lyle?"

"Yes, sir; I observe the heads and shoulders of two men at the wheel."

"Go aloft and see if you can discover aught else."

"Ay, ay, sir;" and taking his glass the lieutenant ascended rapidly the delicate tracery that formed the shrouds.

After a careful scrutiny, Lyle descended to the deck and made his report to his commander.

"It is a clear night, and I will show my colors. Run up the American flag, Mr. Lyle, to the peak of the mizzen yard."

"Ay, ay, captain!" answered the first officer, and taking from the quartermaster the roll of bunting, he attached it to the halyards, and hand over hand hauled it up to the peak of the lofty yard of the mizzen-sail, when a jerk caused it to unfold in the breeze, displaying the ensign of the American Republic.

A cry from the whole crew, officers and men, followed, for distinctly seen in the moonlight, as the pursuer fell off a point, was the same flag from his mizzen-peak!

"That fellow appears a perfect mirror to reflect our every act," said Montclair, with a tone of anxiety.

"Ay, he does! see!" and as Walter Lyle spoke, the sharp bows of the stranger crept nearer and nearer, and threatened to almost touch the stern of the Surf Queen as she went by to leeward.

A moment of terrible suspense to those on board the Surf Queen followed, and then the long, spear-like bowsprit was even with the stern of their vessel, and not five fathoms distant.

"I'll see if they are all dumb aboard. Shall I hail, Captain Montclair?"

"Yes, Lyle, do so."

"Ahoy! the three-master, ahoy!" cried the lieutenant in stentorian tones; but his voice was blown back to him, and the silent vessel crept on, each moment forging past the Surf Queen, and although to leeward, apparently keeping her sails full, in spite of the towering canvas of her adversary.

Again and again the hail was repeated, but no answer came as the strange craft swept by, silently, swiftly, with only the keen sweep of the wind through her rigging, and the swash of the waves, heard. With her guns run out, and a spectre-like crew, seen through the open ports around them, the strange vessel sped on, her keen bow edging past the stern of the Surf Queen, then amidships, then alongside, length with length, and only fifty feet apart, and then beginning to forge on until in ten minutes she had passed ahead, leaving the American cruiser to follow in her wake; but not for long, as she continued to stand oceanward, while the Surf Queen, with officers and men only too glad to let her alone, changed her course along the shores of Long Island, and headed for a northern cruise.

When at length a league separated the two vessels, Montclair drew a deep sigh of relief, and said:

"Well, in all my sea service I never expected to behold a sea phantom; in fact I knew not such a thing existed, except in the minds of the superstitious and ignorant. But, behold! Yonder flies a craft that walked by us, hand over hand, when we have the fastest vessel afloat, and although we have to carry reefed sails now, in this half gale, by Jove she has not taken in an inch of canvas, or my eyes greatly deceive me."

Leaving Walter Lyle in command of the deck the young commander descended into his comfortable cabin to endeavor, by aid of a stiff drink of brandy, a cigar, and sleep, to drive from his thoughts the memory of his vessel's twin, and dream of Claudine Vivian, whom he hoped in a few days to agreeably surprise with a visit, and astound by his promotion to so gallant a barque as was the Surf Queen, for Montclair was plotting both love and war, as he had not by any means forgotten his downfall before the eyes of his hated rival, Harold Marmaduke.

CHAPTER XI.

A PRIZE AND A SURPRISE.

FROM the look-out on the Highlands, Harold and Bianca had watched the coming of the Surf Queen, until she dropped anchor under the shadow of the hills.

"Yes, he is going to visit his home," said Bianca, as the two friends observed the gig push off from the vessel and head shoreward.

"Ay, and with your consent we can meet him, for now I can throw in his teeth the insult he has laid at my door."

"I am willing, Marmaduke. Do not kill him, however; merely wing him and leave your mark."

"I will be governed by your advice, captain. Come, I know the path well."

The meeting between the two young men has already been made known. After it, Harold and Bianca walked slowly toward the home of the pilot, where they were greeted by Aline Ellis, between whom and the captain was rapidly springing up a most tender regard.

Daily growing in grace and beauty, and possessing a refined manner, added to a cultivated mind, for the pilot and his wife had not neglected the education of their daughter, Aline immediately won the admiration of Bianca, an admiration that almost as quickly ripened into love, for the maiden to him was a *rara avis*, as 'twere so different was she from any woman the daring young sailor had ever met.

Toward midnight the moon arose, and Bianca and Harold bade farewell to Mrs. Ellis, and started for the shore, when a boat awaited to carry them on board the Steel Belt.

On the way to the shore Enoch and Harold walked in advance, conversing earnestly, while, following them, and willingly loitering, came

Bianca and Aline, for they had much to say to each other ere parting.

Arriving upon the pier, farewells were spoken, the two officers sprung into their boat, and in ten minutes the Steel Belt was creeping forth from the land's shadow and heading down the Shrewsbury toward Sandy Hook, which the Surf Queen was then rounding under pressure of a ten-knot breeze.

"By the Lord Harry, but our *twin* sails well!" exclaimed Bianca, as he caught sight of the copy of his vessel dashing gallantly along.

"Yes, but I think we are gaining upon her, although not yet out of the shelter of the land where we can get the full breeze," said Harold.

"True, we gain upon her slowly, but soon will double our present speed," and the beautiful vessel gained rapidly upon her rival, passed her in silence, and stood directly out to sea, leaving the Surf Queen to keep on up the coast.

Toward sunrise the following morning a large brig, apparently armed, though her rig and build indicated a merchantman, was discovered to the southward, and immediately the goleta gave chase, and in two hours had brought her to by a well-directed shot, aimed by Harold, which carried away her bowsprit.

On the Steel Belt swept until only a fathom's length divided her from the brig, which kept up a rapid, but ineffectual fire, for her shots were all hurriedly aimed and went wide of their mark.

"Stand ready all! Hard! hard down your helm!"

"Steady, now! Throw your grapnels aboard! Steel Belts, follow me!"

Sweeping around gracefully, as though on a pivot, the Steel Belt came up under the stern and her sharp bowsprit hovered over her decks, while, with rattle and thud, the iron grapnels were thrown by expert hands.

"Steel Belts ahoy!" again rung the cry, and fifty human forms were upon the decks of the Englishman.

In vain the resistance of the dismayed crew of the brig; they were driven back as though before an avalanche, and in two minutes the cry for quarter was heard.

"Sir! I surrender the brig to you," and the commander of the English vessel stepped forward and presented his sword, while a voice suddenly exclaimed:

"As I live! there is Lieutenant Marmaduke!"

"Racine Ney! You here, and why?" and Harold grasped the hand of the young commander of the chebacca-boat, with surprise at seeing him there.

"The story is soon told, Mr. Marmaduke. I am a prisoner, having been captured with the chebacca-boat, when out on a sail, and Lady Claudine—"

"What of her, Racine?" asked Harold, nervously.

"She is aboard, sir."

"Aboard this vessel?"

"Ay, ay, sir; we were out for a sail in the yacht, and were overhauled by this craft."

"Lady Claudine is in the cabin; but, Mr. Marmaduke, who is yonder man?" and Racine turned his eyes toward Bianca.

"That is the commander of our vessel; here he comes. Captain Bianca, this is Racine Ney, a friend of mine, and of whom you have heard me speak."

"Great God! Racine Ney, do you not know me? I am Claude Bianca!"

With a cry Racine sprung forward and grasped the hands of Bianca, saying earnestly: "Indeed, I remember you, my more than half brother, even though long years have passed since last we met, and I believed you dead."

"No, I died not, as you supposed, but lived to seek and find you; but, Racine, what of poor little Clarice?"

"I know not, Claude; I have not seen or heard of her since she was torn from my arms in Vera Cruz, by the vile man who took us from our home."

Bianca stood in silence a moment, and then replied:

"Come, we must away now, for I will put a prize crew aboard the brig and let her follow us into Boston," and in a few minutes all necessary arrangements were made, and Harold having sought the frightened Claudine in the cabin and presented Bianca, who at once promised to return her to her home, with the crew of the Wild Swan, the two vessels squared away and headed northward.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRUISE OF THE STEEL BELT.

TOWARD sunset a pleasant evening a week after the capture of the brig, the bold and rugged coast of Maine was sighted, and, ere day-

light died, Claudine found herself in the gig rowing shoreward, accompanied by Harold Bianca, Racine Ney, and the crew of the chebacc-boats.

At the little pier they were greeted by Lord Vivian, who had noted the approach of the *caravel*, and seeing boat put ashore had gone down to meet it, hoping to hear some tidings of his lost daughter, for whether Claudine had been wrecked or captured he knew not, though he feared the latter, as pieces of the chebacc-boat, which had been scuttled by the crew of the brig, had come ashore, causing the distressed parent to believe she had foundered with all on board.

With a bound, Claudine was on shore and in her father's arms, who could only murmur, while tears of joy rolled down his cheek:

"My daughter, thank God I have you once more to love and caress."

"Yes, father, I am safe, thanks to the courage of these gentlemen, one of whom you have before met and to whom I hope, you will extend a cordial greeting," and Claudine presented Bianca to her father, who received both him and Harold with marked consideration!

Leading the way, Lord Vivian, still holding the hand of Claudine, conducted the party to the villa, where, after they had partaken of refreshments, Harold and Bianca asked for an interview with the nobleman in the library.

It was readily granted, and having motioned his guests to seats, Lord Vivian said:

"I have already learned from Claudine, gentlemen, the strange story of her capture by the English brig, and her recapture by your courage, and my heartfelt thanks are due you both.

"To you, Mr. Marmaduke, I must offer my hand in pardon, for my daughter has also made known to me the romantic circumstances of your eventful life. Believe me, sir, I disliked to believe the aspersions cast upon you by Lieutenant Montclair; but, captain, you asked for an interview; please pardon this digression."

"Assuredly, my lord. I am glad to see you acknowledge your error, and offer the hand of fellowship to my noble friend here, whether his parents were Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, for I am not a believer in any creed that condemns a man for the sins of his forefathers."

Bianca spoke in his usual decided tones, and the nobleman was evidently touched by the tenor of what he said, for he replied simply:

"I agree with you; but, human nature often errs on the wrong path than in the right."

"Lord Vivian," then abruptly said Bianca, "you have with you here a young man, by name Racine Ney. Will you tell me how you first met him?"

"I will, with pleasure. It was in Switzerland years ago, and when Claudine was a little girl. She had rowed out upon the lake, near a villa where we were visiting, when a large dog, her constant companion, seeing her, swam out and attempted to get into the boat, unheeding Claudine's commands to desist, for she was fearful he would overturn the frail skiff.

"Her fears were realized, and she was thrown into the deep water, and, unable to swim, would have drowned but for a lad who went to her assistance, and by almost superhuman exertions brought her to the shore.

"The lad was Racine Ney, then a mere wanderer, for he was going along the road, when, witnessing the overturning of the boat, he had bravely gone to the rescue.

"Struck with the handsome face and frank manner of the youth, I questioned him regarding himself, and found that he lived in America, had been taken from his home by a man who called himself his uncle; but, becoming tired of blows and curses, he had at last left him and was seeking employment.

"From that day Racine Ney was my friend, and I did all in my power to make his life pleasant, for I saw that some trouble was constantly on his mind.

"Coming to America with me, he soon thoroughly learned these waters, and possessing, as he did, considerable sea-knowledge, I put him in command of the chebacc-boat, built him a rustic cottage on the hillside, and made him a kind of general manager of my estate."

"Lord Vivian, I thank you. In return let me give you the story of Racine Ney," and Bianca spoke of how he had been kidnapped with his sister, when the two were children, and how he also had been taken from his home by the vile man who was seeking revenge upon a woman who had inherited the fortune his crime had caused him to lose.

He then went on:

"The treatment received by Racine, seems to

have been such as to almost cause him to forget his happier younger life, for I have talked much with him upon the subject.

"From his poor little sister, Clarice, he was separated, he says, soon after arriving in Vera Cruz, and he knows not what became of her, other than that she was taken from the Mexican house where they were stopping, by a woman, old and hideous; his supposed uncle kept him with him, carrying him to sea, and from what Racine says, I am confident the kidnapper was none other than the noted smuggler and pirate, Angelo."

"Indeed! that ferocious brute who has so long escaped punishment, and under numerous disguises has mingled with the officers of the very vessels of war sent against him!"

"Ay, my lord, I believe that Angelo and my uncle are one and the same.

"It is now my intention to sail for Vera Cruz, carrying Racine with me, whom I hope you can spare."

"He is at your service, Captain Bianca."

"Thanks, my lord; my third luff, Edmund Orlando, is desirous of returning to his own country, so I will proceed to New York and place him in command of my old vessel, which is fitting up there for the Mexican Government, and Racine shall have his place on the Steel Belt.

"Then I will sail for Vera Cruz, serving the United States *en route*, and endeavor to find some trace of little Clarice, after which I shall head up the coast, cross the ocean and visit England with Harold, here, that we may trace the history of his parentage."

"Would you put your heads into the lion's mouth, captain? Do you not know that you would be hung as spies, if captured?"

"Ay, ay, my lord; very true; but risk nothing, nothing gained, and we will not be taken."

"Now duty calls, and we must obey, so if you will summon Lady Claudine we will say farewell."

An hour later and the Steel Belt, skillfully guided through the darkness of the dangerous channel, by Racine—stood seaward.

Touching at Sandy Hook, under cover of the night, Orlando was landed at the home of Enoch Ellis, who was to see him to New York and pilot the Mexican cruiser to sea, and again Claude Bianca and Aline Ellis met, to part more deeply in love with each other than ever before.

Down the coast flew the privateer, capturing several prizes, and now and then engaging in a combat with some vessel of war, until the name of the Steel Belt became famous—admired by the Americans, and dreaded by the British.

At last she dropped anchor in the harbor of Vera Cruz, and leaving Muriel in command, the three friends, Bianca, Harold and Racine went ashore to commence the search for the long lost Clarice.

It was a long and tedious search, but was at last successful in finding out her fate, for beneath an orange tree was a child's grave, the resting-place of poor little Clarice, who had lingered on awhile, and in a foreign land, among strangers, had sunk to sleep.

Satisfied that Clarice was really dead, and also discovering from his search that his uncle was indeed Angelo the pirate, Bianca and his companions went aboard the Steel Belt, after a week's absence, and again the fleet craft put to sea.

Capturing a valuable prize off Cape May, Captain Bianca determined to carry it into New York harbor, as it would give him another opportunity of seeing the lovely Aline Ellis, who was ever in his thoughts.

Accordingly, the following evening, shortly after sunset, the Steel Belt and her prize anchored beneath the Highlands, and was boarded by Enoch Ellis and Aline, who had seen the approach of the well-known privateer.

"Welcome, captain; and Harold, my noble boy, I greet you; but do you know you have some one 'stealing your thunder'?"

"How mean you, Captain Ellis?" asked Claude Bianca, as he still, absentmindedly, clasped Aline's hand.

"Why, your old rival, Montclair, with the twin of your vessel, has received all the credit of your deeds down the coast!"

"She came into New York a few days since, and to-night will put to sea, for one of my men has enlisted on board, as she needed a regular pilot for these waters. Although Montclair has really done some service, he keeps mum about there being another craft afloat like his own, and swallows complacently all the praise for what you have done."

"Indeed! Then we'll sail to-night also; follow him to sea, and give him another scare; but,

Captain Ellis, we are then bound to England to search for the missing link in Harold's life, and after we have found it, will return to the coast of Maine, and make all perfectly clear in the eyes of my Lord Vivian—"

"Lord Vivian! Lord Raphael Vivian! Is he an American?" demanded the pilot, excitedly.

"Ay he is, and it is his lovely daughter that Harold here loves more than he does life."

"My God! how wonderful are the workings of that unseen Heavenly power. Captain Bianca, Lord Vivian has a daughter, you say?"

"Ay, ay, sir—a most beautiful creature. I would describe her for you, did I not fear to make Aline jealous."

"Not a bit of it. I love the beautiful ever, especially in my own sex," answered Aline, pleasantly.

"A daughter! and she is beautiful, and good? He lives in America, then, upon the rugged coast of Maine? Well, all is for the best, perhaps," and the pilot spoke musingly, and as though his thoughts were far in the past, exhuming buried memories.

Suddenly he said:

"Captain Bianca, when you have visited England and gained the knowledge you seek regarding Harold, promise me you will do me one favor."

"I will, so help me God, pilot."

"Thank you. Seek out in Berwickshire—an old woman, she must be now, by the name of Mary Smythe—and from me, offer her gold sufficient to induce her to come across the ocean with you to this my home. Tell her Enoch Ellis sends for her, and with her greed of gold, it will cause her to come."

"Bring her here, ere you touch at the home of Lord Vivian, and thither, not only myself, but my wife and Aline will accompany you, for a revelation must be made."

"Promise me, Claude Bianca."

"I promise."

"Indeed I thank you. Aline, child, we must get ashore now, for in a short time the Surf Queen will be coming down the harbor. Captain, I will see your prize safely up to the city."

So saying the pilot and Aline entered their boat, and an hour after the Steel Belt turned her razor-like bow across the harbor, once more to fall in the wake of the Surf Queen, and to spread consternation aboard her decks.

The surprise of Lennox Montclair and his officers and crew, to behold astern of them the same phantom, or shadow of their own vessel, as they sailed seaward, may be well imagined.

"The last time we sailed from this port the same shadow haunted us," said Lennox, to Walter Lyle.

"It is unaccountable," answered the lieutenant.

"You have as large a vessel, a full complement of men and guns, why not fight him and solve the mystery, Captain Montclair?" abruptly put in Talbot Latrobe, who stood near.

"I am the best judge of my actions, sir," said Montclair, angrily, but not wishing to be cowardly, he continued:

"Besides, Mr. Latrobe, yonder craft carries the United States flag."

"True; but I would fight him if he carried the ensign of Heaven, if he dogged my steps," vehemently replied the lieutenant as he walked forward.

As before, the Steel Belt rapidly gained upon the Surf Queen, and silently plowed by, unheeding the hail from Montclair.

Standing directly seaward the Steel Belt was soon lost to view, bound upon her mission across the ocean.

CHAPTER XIII.

STARTLING REVELATIONS.

To follow the Steel Belt on her voyage across the sea would take too much time, so I will hasten on to the scenes more nearly connected with this romance.

Seeking a quiet harbor on the Irish coast, Bianca left Carryl Muriel in command, and Racine to aid him, and departed with Harold for England, both dressed in the Mexican uniform, and carrying passports as citizens of that country.

Arrived with the diary of Arthur Denison, who had been in the boat with him, and guided by the information the pilot had given, Harold commenced his search and readily traced his parentage, discovering himself, with pride and pleasure, to be the descendant of one of England's noblest families, the only male member of which living, besides himself, was his grandfather, the old Earl of Marmaduke.

Anxious to welcome an heir to his name, title,

and estates, in the offspring of his own son, the earl received Harold most kindly, for he desired to atone all in his power for past unkindnesses to the father of the young man.

The finding of his grandson rejuvenated the old gentleman, and he consented to return with Harold to America, for the young officer had told him all his life, and then learned how the earl, in his youth, when but eighteen years of age, the father of the hero of this story, had secretly wedded the daughter of a worthy but poor baronet, and the marriage becoming known to his father, the Earl of Marmaduke, the young couple were at once separated.

Disappointed, and devotedly attached to his girl-wife, Lord Marmaduke had offered to resign his title and estates to claim her; but this the proud earl would not allow, and sent his son to India, as an officer of a cavalry regiment, hoping to wean him from his attachment.

In that far-away land, in a charge against the enemy, the young nobleman lost his life; but to bear his name had been born a son, which had been taken from its mother and reared in a distant town, until the man and his wife, in whose charge he had been left, emigrated to America, carrying the boy with them, for they were paid by the young mother to do so, as she feared harm might befall her son.

Seeing that his grandson was determined to remain in the American navy, the earl accepted the invitation of Bianca to accompany them to America, and accordingly the party started for Ireland, stopping *en route* for the captain to keep his promise made to Enoch and get the woman, Mary Smythe, to go with them, which a large bribe caused her to do.

Determined not to have an engagement or capture an English prize with his distinguished guest on board, Bianca stood directly across, and in twenty days sighted the hills of Neversink, where was the home of Enoch Ellis.

Standing upon the Highland look-out, Enoch saw the distant Steel Belt, and calling to his wife and Aline, bade them get ready to accompany him.

The preparations were soon made, the house left in care of a trusty servant, and the three went on board the little Marmaduke, which at once got up anchor and stood out to meet the incoming vessel.

Shortly after dark the Marmaduke ran alongside the Steel Belt, and the pilot, his wife and Aline were gladly welcomed on board the privateer, and presented to the earl, while a stiff greeting passed between Captain and Mrs. Ellis and Mary Smythe, for in the bosoms of the three was locked a deep secret of the past.

A week after the meeting of the Steel Belt and the Marmaduke off Sandy Hook, Lord Vivian and Lady Claudine were standing together upon the rocky point near the villa, glancing down upon a vessel, upon the decks of which was waging a scene of dire confusion and carnage.

The vessel was the Surf Queen, sailing quietly along over the waters, while a terrible combat was waging upon her decks, for rapid firing, the clash of steel, and yells of contending foes were heard far and wide.

"What can it mean, dear father?" asked Claudine, her beautiful face pale with dread.

"It is doubtless a mutiny on board, daughter; at first I thought it was the Steel Belt, but now I recognize the uniform of the United States, and discover it is the Surf Queen; that young Montclair has gotten himself into trouble. See! the mutineers have raised their own flag, and, horrible! they are throwing the bodies of their dead and living foes into the ocean," exclaimed Lord Vivian.

And as they gazed, they saw the beautiful vessel turn seaward, having cleared her decks of the dead and dying, and peacefully sail away over the quiet waters.

But ere she was far distant an exclamation from Claudine attracted her father's attention to a dark object upon the water.

"Father, it is a man swimming shoreward; let us hasten to his aid," cried the enthusiastic girl, and in ten minutes more they were in a skiff rapidly pulling toward the swimmer.

Ere long he was drawn into the boat; an honest-faced seaman, who exclaimed, pleasantly:

"By the holy Moses, I am thrown into the sea by the devil and pulled out by an angel. Lady, I am your humble servant with thanks;" and he bowed to Claudine, who did not fail to note the pretty compliment paid her.

"Well, my man, what is the cause of your being here? Was there a mutiny aboard?" asked Lord Vivian.

"Indeed was there, sir, the devil of a one, begging your pardon, miss, and Captain Montclair, Lieutenant Lyle and a host of others given to the fishes for food by that hound of hell, beg pardon, lady, the second luff of our craft."

"The second officer heading a mutiny! do I hear aright?" asked the nobleman.

"It's as I tell you. Lieutenant Talbot Latrobe, bad luck to him, was the old sarpint; he won the crew over to his way of thinking, and just as we was putting in here, up rose the mutineers, headed by the second luff, and in a short while the good and true boys were cut down and thrown overboard, while I, seeing how matters were going, played 'possum and was cast into the sea for dead, and struck out for the shore—Holy apostles! and the ten tribes of Israel! what is that?"

With pale face and staring eyes the seaman pointed to where, just having rounded a wooded point of land was seen a vessel the very twin of the one just taken by the mutineers.

"The Steel Belt!"

"The privateer!" exclaimed Claudine and her father, as their eyes fell upon her, and then Lord Vivian, aroused to action, spoke sternly:

"We'll head her off and tell them all, and if Bianca does not quickly overhaul the Surf Queen and punish those mutineers, I am mistaken in the man."

Away flew the light skiff over the waters, and soon a loud hail came from the Steel Belt, for it was indeed the privateer.

"Luff up, and we'll board you. Stand ready to throw us a line!" cried Lord Vivian, and a few moments after the three stood on the deck of the Steel Belt, while the skiff was hastily cast loose, as the nobleman cried:

"Set all sail, Captain Bianca, in chase of yonder craft. Her crew, under her second lieutenant, Talbot Latrobe, have mutinied—"

"Talbot Latrobe! My lord, ere I welcome you on board, let me ask you if you said Talbot Latrobe?"

"I did, sir."

"Then I overhaul that vessel, or sink this craft in the attempt with all on board," and the tone of Claude Bianca rung with terrible distinctness as he gave his orders.

Turning again to his guests, his manner subdued once more though there was a deadly twinkle in his eyes, Captain Bianca continued:

"My lord, now will I welcome you and Lady Claudine on board the Steel Belt, and present to you other guests of mine," and he led the nobleman, while Harold escorted Claudine, aft, where stood Marmaduke, Enoch Ellis and his wife, and the beautiful Aline, who had watched with interest the coming of the party on board, and with surprise the angry vehemence of Bianca's orders that followed.

"The Earl of Marmaduke!"

"My Lord Vivian!" were the exclamations from the two noblemen as their eyes fell upon each other, and their hands were clasped in a warm grasp, for they had been friends for years; but, as the eyes of Raphael Vivian fell upon Enoch Ellis and his wife he started back, his face paled, and it was a moment ere he spoke; then he said:

"Ellis, have you and your wife forgiven me? It was cruel of me to thus deceive you, but bitterly have I repented."

"You are forgiven, my lord, for I have been avenged. Here all are friends, and now I will speak, for my heart is bursting to—to—Raphael, you tell all," and Mrs. Ellis would have fallen, had not Lord Vivian upheld her while he said:

"Yes, I will tell all, even though it is hard for me to do so."

"Years ago, as a college boy, I won the heart of this woman, who was the daughter of a village curate near the university; she was happy then, and had for her lover this man, Enoch Ellis, a brave young sailor on the king's yacht; but dazzled by the offers I made her she gave him up and promised to be my wife; but willingly I deceived her, for already was I betrothed to Marguerite Danforth, the daughter of a baronet, of little wealth but good family."

"Well do I remember that, my lord, and after a while I have a confession to make," said the Earl of Marmaduke.

"Indeed! then I am not the only penitent; but to continue: I married Marguerite Danforth, and cast from me this poor woman, who turned again to Enoch Ellis, this noble man, and became his wife, for he deserted her not when he knew I had discarded her."

"Now, my lord, listen: yes, you discarded me, and Enoch took me again to his heart; we were married, and I gave birth to a little girl the very day that your proud wife had a

daughter. Then I thought of *revenge*, and bribed this woman here—Mary Smythe—who had come down as my nurse from London, and whom your lady was forced to send for, as she was taken prematurely ill; I bribed her, I say, to make an exchange of the babes, that *my child* might grow up to inherit wealth and fame. *Claudine Vivian*, do you recognize in me your own mother?" and with streaming eyes and outstretched hands the poor woman stood awaiting recognition.

Claudine turned pale as death, glanced around her slowly, letting her eyes fall upon Aline for a moment, then upon Lord Vivian's face; then turning upon Enoch and again toward her mother, she spoke slowly:

"Yes, it must be true; surely you would not deceive me. Yes, you are my mother, and *you* my father."

With a cry of joy Mrs. Ellis sprung forward and infolded her to her heart, while Lord Vivian, with proof too strong for doubt, drew the surprised Aline to his breast and called her his daughter.

"Now, my lord, listen to my confession, for I have something to say," and the voice of the earl broke the spell.

"I am listening, Earl Marmaduke."

"Were you aware that Marguerite Danforth, the daughter of Sir Lacey Danforth, was married in her fifteenth year, ere she became your wife?"

"By no means, sir; that were impossible," almost angrily said Lord Vivian.

"You mistake. Some weeks since I found my grandson, Harold Marmaduke, who stands here. His father, my son, entered into a secret marriage with a young girl of fifteen, he being then eighteen, but which marriage I had legally dissolved, and sent my son to India, where, you may remember, he lost his life. His wife returned to her home, and her marriage being unknown, nothing was said of it, and as a young girl she married you, although she had then living a son, and that son is Harold Marmaduke, the half-brother of your daughter, Aline."

Words cannot picture the surprise and joy all felt at these startling revelations; and congratulations were exchanged upon all sides, and all in their happiness forgot the flying Surf Queen, until the stern voice of Bianca was heard.

"Ladies, you must go below now, for I am going to fire upon the chase, and sink her, for yonder vessel is commanded by my uncle, Talbot Latrobe, a man who has brought much misery upon me and mine, and who entered the service of the United States to get possession of a fleet cruiser to devote to piracy."

Having seen that Aline, Claudine, Mrs. Ellis and Mary Smythe had descended into the cabin, and given the earl, Lord Vivian, Enoch and the seaman from the Surf Queen, arms to join in the attack, Bianca issued the order to fire, and a terrific broadside of iron hail was poured upon the flying Surf Queen, then less than a mile distant.

The effect of the fire from the Steel Belt was most disastrous, for the bowsprit was shot away, the mizzen-mast was cut down even with the bulwarks, and the beautiful vessel lay almost a wreck upon the water.

But though in a dangerous position, the bold and wicked Frenchman who commanded the Surf Queen, determined to fight to the bitter end, and he rapidly trained his guns upon the Steel Belt.

Changing his position, Bianca sailed rapidly down upon his foe, pouring in a terrible fire as he advanced, and soon ran his sharp bow over the stern of the mutineer's craft, while, with a cry of rage, and followed by Harold and Racine, he sprung upon the vessel's decks, and confronted Talbot Latrobe, who cried, as his eyes fell upon his nephew:

"Ha! Claude Bianca, you live? Come on then to your death."

"So be it, vile man of crime."

The swords crossed with a clang, flashed for a moment, and then the mutineer's weapon was beaten down and Bianca drove his keen blade through his heart, just as Harold came aft to report that the crew of the Surf Queen had been all slain or made prisoners.

Bianca stood for a moment in silence, his eyes resting sadly upon the slain man, and then, starting suddenly, as if recalling himself from bitter memories, he said:

"Yes; it is well, Mr. Marmaduke: you have done well; but let us away from here."

"Racine, you take command of this vessel, and with thirty of my crew, carry her into Portland harbor, and soon I will join you there. Come, Harold."

So saying, Bianca, followed by his first officer,

returned on board the Steel Belt, when the grapnels were cast loose, and the privateer set sail back for the anchorage under the hills upon which stood Sea View Castle.

Safely the Steel Belt bore the party to the land, and ere sunset all were assembled within the spacious parlors of Sea View Castle.

Then it was that Lord Vivian told Harold of his mother, and how, for years she had been confined to her room, her brain having entirely gone; but the young officer begged to see her, and was conducted by Lord Vivian to the quiet wing of the villa where his lady mother abode.

What passed between the two was never known, but certain it is, that the cobwebs of disease were swept away from the weak mind, the heart was touched at sight of her first-born, and Lady Vivian regained her memory, recognized as her own child Harold Marmaduke, and together the two entered the parlors and gladdened all by the happy change, especially Lord Vivian, who had dearly loved his invalid wife.

Thus Aline Ellis became Lady Aline Vivian, fondly devoted to her new-found parents, and though Claudine was only the humble pilot's daughter, she was perfectly happy in the love of Enoch and his wife, and more than idolized Lord Harold Marmaduke, when she saw the coming of his title and wealth had not taken from her his heart.

Through the three years' war, Bianca and Harold fought, the former still in command of his beautiful vessel, which was commissioned a cruiser in the American service, and the latter as commander of the sloop-of-war Ambuscade, for he was reinstated in the service with the rank of captain, while Racine Ney consoled himself for his loss of Claudine's love, by going privateering in the Surf Queen, which was refitted for him by Captain Bianca.

When at last war folded her bloody pinions and peace settled upon the face of the land, Claude Bianca and Aline Vivian became man and wife, while, married at the same time, so as to have a double wedding, was Harold, Earl of Marmaduke, to Claudine Ellis.

Noticeable among the guests present, other than the families of the parties interested, were Admiral Moreton, formerly of the frigate Portsmouth, and boatswain Mat Morris, who heartily expressed his delight at the beauty and grace of the consorts chosen by his officers for a voyage across the sea of life.

THE END.

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